

THE
INVESTIGATORS
in
THE CASE OF THE
CONCEALED FOULS





in

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OF THE
CONCEALED FOULS**

A successful German football team is having a mid-season break from their league competition and chooses to train in California. But soon, the team harmony is shaken by sinister events, creating problems between the coach and certain players. The Three Investigators takes up the case and suspects that an external party is causing disruptions to the team. But what is the motive for doing so? Things become more complicated as there are so many people involved and the detectives are baffled as to whom they can trust...

The Three Investigators
in
The Case of the Concealed Fouls

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(The Three ???: Concealed Fouls)

by

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1. Dream Ball

Pete looked spellbound through the meshes of the fence. It was a warm February day in California. The sun shone on the green grass of the football pitch beyond the barrier. A player was practising there all by himself.

Fascinated, Pete watched the scene. It was a dream place to train at the facility of the new Sports Hotel. Pete let his eyes wander. Tennis courts and basketball courts adjoined the football pitch. Occasionally groups of trees were scattered in the hilly landscape. Not far from the hotel building, was the inviting blue water of a swimming pool. Heavenly! For an enthusiastic sportsman like Pete, this was a little paradise.

Suddenly Pete noticed a small movement. On the opposite side of the football pitch was a low-rise building used for the players' changing rooms and showers.

Pete saw one of the two doors open a gap. A head appeared, looked all around, and then went back in. Apparently, someone wanted to check out what was going on outside. Strange, Pete thought, as the door was slowly closed again. Then everything was quiet again. Only the player on the lawn continued to practise undisturbed.

Maybe the man was just looking for someone, thought Pete and smiled. As a detective, he had to be extra conscious of the surroundings. He again turned his full attention to the player. Of course, he knew who he was—Julio da Elba, the Brazilian star of the German football team FC Borussia. The team had set up their winter training camp here in warm California. Pete knew all the names of the players on this team. After all, he himself played football enthusiastically and regularly watched European football on cable television.

Julio da Elba didn't seem to notice the admirer. Self-sunken, he kept playing the ball into the air. With the right foot, with the left, with the head—over and over again. But all this seemed to bore Elba. Now he moved the ball more playfully with the back, the chest, even the shoulders, the heels, the knees. He used his whole body, with catlike movements as if by itself the ball bounced. Pete could not avert the gaze.

The whole team also plays as light and carefree as Elba, Pete thought. The club seemed to be strolling through the German league this season. For weeks already, they had a visible advantage leading the league table, and still unbeaten in the European competition. A real surprise team, because none of the experts had expected this form. FC Borussia, once a regular mid-table team in the German league, had turned into a dazzling force in the last months. This was not least due to the coach, who was considered media shy, but had apparently created a climate of success.

A noise interrupted Pete from his flow of thoughts. A car came up the driveway to the hotel grounds and stopped at the entrance security booth, which was about one hundred metres in front of the main hotel building.

Camera eyes monitored the access road next to the security booth, where a man now checked in the arrivals. Security was obviously a top priority here. However, the Sports Hotel also accommodated highly paid guests. It was only now that Pete noticed that other cameras were installed along the fence. Probably he himself just showed up on one of the monitors.

Pete turned back to the scene at the security booth. The distance was too great for him to see what kind of people were sitting in the car. Now the barrier went up and the car drove

along the small road to the covered hotel entrance. Then the car doors opened.

Pete could hardly believe his eyes. Getting out of the car was his friend Bob Andrews and his father, who worked as a journalist for the *Los Angeles Times*. They waited briefly, then a man in a dark jacket stepped out of the hotel entrance towards them and shook their hands.

Pete hissed through his teeth. Bob, of all people, who was a hundred times less interested in football than himself, was able to get to meet the big stars up close. Probably his father was supposed to write a report for the newspaper about the guests from Germany and he had allowed Bob to tag along. Deep in a conversation, the three of them disappeared into the hotel.

Julio da Elba played on calmly, completely unimpressed by the arrival of the guests. But Pete's magic of watching was broken. He looked at his watch. It was about time he made his way back. Tonight he wanted to meet Jupiter and Bob, the other two detectives, at the salvage yard. And it would take him a while to ride his bike back. So he swung onto his vehicle and made his way back to Rocky Beach.

He looked a little grimly at the wonderful area that lay before him. Yes, he had tortured himself up here by bicycle, only to catch a glimpse of the footballers from a distance. And Bob just drove up by car. At that moment, his friend was probably sitting chatting with players like Mats Sommer and Jürgen Klinger, without even really appreciating it. Pete tried to suppress his jealousy, but he hardly managed to enjoy the really nice descent to Rocky Beach.

Jupiter greeted his uncle Titus only briefly from a distance, but then took a step and quickly turned right. He really didn't feel like helping his uncle. Titus was just trying to get the last remnants of recyclable material out of a wrecked car standing in the middle of The Jones Salvage Yard.

"Hi, Jupe! You're just in time," he shouted over and pulled a car radio from the wreckage. A whole tangle of wires followed. "I was about to remove the rear bumper."

"Oh, Uncle Titus!" replied Jupe. "I still have so much to do. Bob and Pete will be here in a few minutes. We finally want to clean up our headquarters again. Actually, they should be there by now."

The headquarters of The Three Investigators was an old mobile home trailer that rusted between old metal sheets and bars at the salvage yard. In the course of time, Jupiter, Bob and Pete had accommodated all kinds of technical equipment in it. Over Christmas nights and New Year's Eve the three friends had let their hobbies run pretty bad, and tonight they wanted to go to Headquarters together to see what needed to be sorted out—old files, get supplies of drinks and even do some cleaning.

Uncle Titus was merciful. "All right, Jupe, if you want to clean up, I'm fine with that."

Aunt Mathilda stuck her head out of the kitchen window. "But really clean up," she called out to Jupiter. "Not that you just sit around and talk your heads off again! That's how it always ends."

Jupiter moaned. Of course, his aunt had heard every word again. And she was basically right. He turned to her and raised his hand to the vow. "I promise."

Then he unlocked the trailer and dropped into the chair that was right next to the answering machine. He pressed the play button. Bob's voice was heard.

"Hi, Jupe. Hi, Pete. My father wants to surprise me and take me to a newspaper meeting this afternoon. I'll tell you tonight. So I'll be a little late. You can start tidying up without me.

Bye!”

Motionless, Jupiter sat in the armchair. Another call followed. Pete’s voice. “Hi, Jupe. Hi, Bob. I heard today that a famous German football team is training nearby. Now I am on my way there by bike and it is further away than I thought. I’m sorry, I’ll probably join you a little later. Start cleaning up. See you later!”

There were no more messages on the tape.

“Bob has an appointment and Pete’s all about football,” Jupe moaned. “Lazy team. I guess I’m supposed to be dawdling around alone. When it is about mundane work, you can wait a long time for these friends.”

Grumbling, he got up and left the trailer. “Uncle Titus,” he shouted across the square. “Wait, I’ll help you out!”

2. A Strange Prank

With his hair ruffled by the wind, Pete reached the gate to the salvage yard. He just got off his bike as Mr Andrews's car turned around the corner, slowly rolled and stopped in front of the entrance gate.

Bob got out and ran to Pete. "Hi, Pete. What's Jupe doing?"

Pete greeted briefly and looked over. Jupiter was just about to carry a car seat across the yard with Uncle Titus. Pete and Bob had rarely seen Jupiter get so involved in the salvage yard lately.

Jupiter turned his head for a moment. "If you two sleepyheads think you can leave your First Investigator alone to clean up the trailer, you're wrong," he shouted across the yard. "Wipe and clean up the dust! Just go ahead and get started. I'll catch up later."

Bob bumped into Pete with his elbow and grinned. "Our leader is mad because we're late, huh?"

"Talk about being late," Pete snapped back. "You are being chauffeured around in a fancy car while I'm on a bike!"

Bob took a step back. "My goodness, you've got a lot of air, huh? What can I do about it when you're always cycling around? I thought this was your favourite past-time." He shrugged his shoulders and went into the trailer. Pete followed him. A little later, Jupe also came in.

"Our headquarters really needs a clean up," Bob said and swept his hand over the computer on which a thick layer of dust had accumulated. Loosely he swung into one of the armchairs and beamed at Jupiter and Pete. He was visibly in high spirits.

"So start now. There's a dust cloth back there," Jupiter said.

"Don't you want to know where I was today," Bob asked and looked at his two friends in a challenging way.

Pete was clear that Bob wanted to break the big news now, if only to annoy him. Bob wanted them to know that he was with the big football stars, Klinger and Sommer, so that Pete could burst with jealousy.

But Pete wanted to toy around with Bob. "Never mind where you've been," he said to Bob. "The cleanliness of the office is more important right now."

Jupiter immediately understood that a little game was developing between Bob and Pete and, with an expectant smile, pressed a dust cloth into Bob's hand. He accepted it, but didn't move.

"Klinger..." started Bob and grinned at Pete. He had casually swung one leg over the armrest.

"I'll take care of football again tomorrow," Pete replied and wiped the answering machine with great concentration. "Now the dust is cleaned off!"

"Mats Sommer..." Bob lured once more.

Pete did not react and continued to clean vigorously. Jupe had to grin. Even killer bacteria have no chance of survival there, he thought.

He then turned to Bob. "Come on, get a move on. Your hand's about to go to sleep."

"FC Borussia..." sang Bob now and rocked his head.

Pete stood in front of him. "Bob, would you please have the courtesy of getting off this chair. I'd like to clean it without you in it."

"I think Bob's stuck there," Jupiter smirked. "We have to do the cleaning without him."

Pete waved his rag in front of Bob's face. Bob sneezed out loud. "Man, Pete, don't do that!" Then he blurted out.

"Imagine I was with FC Borussia from Germany today! They're here and I talked to Klinger and Sommer. Me personally! They're really nice guys, by the way."

"So, now we know," Pete replied without a trace. "Could you please help us now?"

Bob looked at him in surprise. No questions?

"Bob, this is not news for Pete," Jupiter interfered.

Now it was Pete's turn to look at his friend in astonishment. "How do you know that?"

"Deduction," Juve said. "Pete, you told me on the answering machine that you were on your way there by bicycle. Bob left the message that he was going to an appointment with his father. And from your behaviour just now, Pete and Bob, it was crystal clear that you, Pete, saw Bob there, but he didn't see you. You wouldn't let him have his triumph. But in reality, you are dying to hear about FC Borussia."

"Our First Investigator," Pete said, grinning at Bob. "That's exactly how it was. I stood behind the fence and saw your father and you arrive." That broke the ice.

While the three friends were cleaning up the trailer, Bob reported in detail about the visit to the Sports Hotel. "FC Borussia is holding its winter training camp here. They'll stay in California for ten days. My father is to write a report for the *Los Angeles Times*," Bob said. "He has no idea about football and spontaneously took me with him."

"As if you had any idea," Pete grumbled and then asked: "Where's the report going to appear?"

"Unfortunately only on page three in the local section," Bob replied.

"Most people here have never heard of FC Borussia," Jupiter interrupted him. "Football hardly interests anyone here in America. It's just not that popular. If we didn't have Pete and our football-loving girlfriends, I wouldn't even know the rules of the game."

"In Europe, however, the team is currently at the top of the German league with 37 points," Pete replied.

"And with 51 goals scored," Jupiter added. The First Investigator was not particularly interested in football, but everything that had to do with numbers and facts, he stored involuntarily in his brain.

"Besides, they not only play successfully, but also beautifully. This will also interest our friends," said Pete. "Although Kelly is more of a follower of Milan."

"And Lys is currently into Barcelona," Jupiter added.

Now it was Bob's turn to bring his girlfriend into the game as well. "Elizabeth is very familiar with women's football. And it's much more popular in America than it is in Europe."

But Pete wanted to learn more about the training camp. "Now tell me about your visit," he drilled.

That's what Bob had been waiting for. "First, Mr Toll, an employee of the hotel, received us."

"The one with the dark jacket," Pete interrupted him. "Black short hair, maybe in his mid-thirties."

"Yeah, exactly, he said he was from hotel's marketing department. He asked us a few questions about our intentions and then led us to a press room where we met Mats Sommer and Jürgen Klinger. Later, the coach, Jochen Franke, joined in."

"So what did you talk about?"

“We mainly talked about why stars like that come to train in California of all places,” Bob replied.

“Because they love California,” Jupe said. “For example, because of the mild weather.”

“Yes, because of the weather, of course. But above all, because they can move more freely here. In Germany, even throughout Europe, they cannot take to the streets without being mobbed. It’s different here, where hardly anyone knows them. It is a mid-season training camp for enhancing harmony between the players which would contribute to the team success. This is their strength, the team spirit, despite some celebrated stars. They definitely want to save this strength for the second half of the season. And the conditions here are great for that purpose, the coach said.”

Pete agreed. “It would be a real treat for them if they become champions this season. Unlike other big clubs, Borussia didn’t fire the coach with every little crisis, instead they always stood by him. After all, Franke formed this harmonious team and taught them modern football. And all this without the big money. As a result, many other teams are watching them closely and lurking for their downfall, of course.”

“But it’s a matter of team harmony,” Bob said.

Pete looked at him questioningly.

“Just before we drove back, there was some excitement. A player’s jersey has been cut. He came into the room angrily with the shreds in his hand and wanted to speak to the coach immediately. We had to leave then, unfortunately.”

“A strange prank indeed in an allegedly so harmonious team,” Jupiter muttered. “Do you know who it was?”

“I don’t know his name. But wait, the printed number on the jersey was still legible. It was eleven.”

“Julio da Elba,” Pete and Jupiter said like out of one mouth.

3. Bob Stays on the Ball

Jupiter's interest had awakened. "Where did Elba find the jersey?" he wanted to know.

"When he opened his locker," Bob replied. "Fortunately, Elba said that in English, otherwise I would hardly have understood a word. Maybe he doesn't speak German."

"Elba speaks English because he played for an English club for three years before going to Germany," Jupe said. "But he probably doesn't speak much German either, he's only been playing there for a year."

Pete looked at Jupiter in surprise. He knew quite well that the First Investigator was not interested in football. Knowing the number of goals Borussia scored earlier was not so surprising for Jupiter. That was due to his penchant for statistics, which immediately impressed him. But that he now also knew the name and jersey number of Elba and now even casually noticed how long Elba had been playing in Germany, Pete wouldn't have believed Jupiter's mastermind could do that.

Jupiter, who correctly interpreted Pete's astounded facial expression, added: "Lys thinks Elba is so sweet. Ever since she followed him on TV, I've had my eye on it."

Pete smiled. Bob, in the meantime, was undisturbed in his thoughts. "Maybe not, but maybe it is," he murmured to himself.

"Bob, you speak in riddles," Jupiter said.

"Maybe we can take the jersey case in our hands," Bob replied.

"I could also imagine that," Pete said, remembering the small, inconspicuous scene outside the changing room, which he had not attached any particular importance to at first. "There was someone in the changing rooms who didn't want to be seen. Maybe it was coach Franke, but the distance was too great for me to be sure."

Just as Jupiter was about to say something, the door of the trailer opened. The Three Investigators turned around. Aunt Mathilda appeared with a tray in her hands.

"I knew it," she shouted triumphantly. "Nothing about tidying up. You sit around and talk your heads off. Do these three gentlemen have another puzzle? And do the gentlemen still have time in between for a few sandwiches and some juice?"

"Maybe a new puzzle, but more like a stupid prank," Jupiter said. "So right now we have plenty of time for your really great sandwiches. What would we be without you?"

"Much more independent, at least when it comes to preparing food," Aunt Mathilda replied with a smile and put the tray down. The friends grabbed the food enthusiastically.

Then Aunt Mathilda wrinkled her forehead. "By the way, if you're looking for your dusters, they are lying on the floor..." Then she left the detectives' headquarters.

The three friends grinned at each other. Pete grabbed a glass of juice and reported how fascinated he was watching Elba play. "A dream-like technician, this Elba. But the others aren't bad either. I'd love to see the whole team play live."

"Maybe soon you'll be able to do that up close," Bob said, chewing.

"What do you mean?" Pete looked at him curiously.

"The coach told us that when clubs like Borussia are at a training camp, they sometimes hold a training match with a lower league or non-league team. Usually it is a closed door match to help the coach try out new strategies and positioning. We chatted with the coach

about teams that they could play with. Anyway, I dropped the name of your football team at a very appropriate moment..."

"Goodness, Bob!" Pete beamed. "I don't believe it! You're a... a truly great friend!"

"The great reconciliation," Jupiter murmured. "All's well, all's well."

The Three Investigators decided to continue monitoring the football team. Jupe turned to Bob. "Do you think your father could bring you along during his coverage of FC Borussia? Then we could continue to have you observe the events there."

"Good idea! He doesn't care much about football and certainly could write me a letter to have me represent the paper. He'll be a little surprised that I suddenly get interested in football, but at some point everyone starts..."

"Except me," Jupiter replied. "I'll stay out of sports, unless there is a case."

"What about me?" Pete asked disappointed. "Don't you have a job for me? After all, I'm the only real fan here!"

"There's nothing for you to do right now," Jupiter replied and grinned. "Besides, as a fan, you will very quickly lose the distance a detective needs. But seriously, Pete, the best training is for the game against Borussia. You know, they're enormously strong..."

"Tomorrow morning, we have a holiday training session," Pete said, somewhat reconciled. "Believe me, I'm really motivated."

Voluntary training during the holidays wasn't by chance. In the last months, Pete's football club had grown into a well-rehearsed troupe. Their reputation went far beyond the borders of Rocky Beach that they were repeatedly participated in smaller tournaments. In one of those matches, they even beat a team from the US professional league.

Pete would have liked to talk about his football achievements, but by now it had become too late to indulge in memories—and too late to dust and clean up their trailer. The friends arranged to meet the next day.

Bob saw his father having breakfast. He didn't need much time to persuade him.

"Okay, you're welcome to cover the football club," Mr Andrews said and turned the page. "I'll write you a letter for you to represent the paper. You know that football isn't that popular here. If Borussia could hold that training match with our local Rocky Beach team, then maybe that could garner some interest around here."

Again he turned the pages of the newspaper. "Look, there's my report," he said, holding out the paper to Bob.

'German Football Stars looking for Sun and Peace' was the headline. Bob's gaze fell on the photo next to the article. It showed Elba conjuring with the ball on the lawn in front of the Sports Hotel. In the background of the picture a man ran towards the changing rooms. He was not exactly recognizable, but he wore a jacket that Bob thought he recognized. It was Franke's black leather jacket. So Pete had probably observed correctly. 'Brazilian star, Elba—who has the golden foot, earns millions in Europe' was the caption.

"When was the photo taken?" Bob inquired. "We didn't have a camera with us."

"I arranged for a photographer there," his father said casually. "I think he was there just before us."

"Can I keep the article?"

"Of course. I'm glad you're finally interested in my reports!" Bob tore out the corresponding page and handed the rest of the newspaper back to his father.

The phone rang. Bob jumped up and picked up the phone. "Bob, I'll hug you a thousand times," he heard the yelling from the receiver. No question, that was Pete. "Tomorrow we

have a game against FC Borussia! The coaches agreed to it last night.”

“Wow,” Bob said. “And I’ll do the match report!”

4. The Match Begins

The weather was again at its best. Pete's team, Rocky's Beach Boys, gathered in the blue changing room on the left, and FC Borussia's players were in the red room on the right. This was in the building that Pete had seen from the fence.

Inside, Mr Fellows spoke. He was a sports teacher and was the coach of the Beach Boys. He had the team gathered around him to give final instructions to individual players. Pete was to play as an attacking midfielder directly behind the two strikers and supply them with balls, or, if there were gaps, he was to push into them.

"You won't find many chances to go past their defenders, so go ahead and shoot from outside the box if you have the chance," said Fellows. "Kühn may be a good goalkeeper, but at some point he'll probably be surprised by a shot. And I also want our midfielders to chase down the ball and create some resistance for their strikers. Don't leave that two our defenders, for they will be too near our goal then. They are a top team so we have nothing to lose, but we don't want to make it too easy for them."

Mr Fellows turned to everyone again: "Remember, they secretly believe we Americans can't tell a football from an egg. Show them that we can also play with a round ball!"

But it was clear to everyone that the game was against a superior opponent. Therefore first and foremost, it should just be for fun. So the coaches had also agreed not to go too hard on each other in order to avoid injuries.

"Well, take on the challenge, boys," called Mr Fellows. "And sell yourselves well. Time to go out and do your stuff!"

"There's still nothing going on!" Kelly pushed Bob in the side. "Bob, do you know a vacation job for me? Money's running out."

Probably the clothes, Bob thought, looking at them. Kelly was wearing a fancy light sweater with an Italian label.

Bob shrugged his shoulders. "So far, I can't get one myself either."

At Borussia's request, the Beach Boys had only brought their closest friends with them as spectators. Jupiter and Lys had opted out because a former acting colleague of Lys had a child and they wanted to visit her in hospital. But of course Pete's girlfriend Kelly was there and Bob had come with Elizabeth. Together with some schoolmates and a German journalist, they stood at the edge of the pitch and impatiently watched the changing room building on the opposite side of the field.

Finally, Bob pointed to the pitch. "Look, Kelly, they're coming."

Both teams ran in. The captains went to the centre circle for the coin toss, then they shook hands and the referee whistled for the start of the match.

Before the spectators knew it, Borussia was already three to nothing. Elba scored twice, whose shots were simply too powerful. Bob didn't know the other scorer. He asked the German journalist standing next to him and learned that the player's name was Anton Strasser.

But then Pete's eleven settled down and played better. At least the passing was better and in one of these counter-attacks, the two Beach Boy strikers swung to the right and left and

pulled their opponents along, Pete even got room for a targeted right shot, which forced Kühn to a brilliant save.

Kelly was thrilled. Now it was up to the German journalist to ask Bob for Pete's name.

"Pete Crenshaw," Bob said, with pride. "A very good friend of mine. My name is Bob Andrews, by the way."

The German also introduced himself: "Toni Krautbauer. I'm a journalist and I'm here for the *Münchner TagesKurier*."

Bob said he was writing for the *Los Angeles Times*. At that moment there was another good move for Pete, who played the ball between his legs of his opponent.

"That Crenshaw's pretty cheeky," Krautbauer said, acknowledging. "No player likes opponents like that."

Through these two good moves by Pete, Bob had almost forgotten that he was there not only for the game. He let his eyes wander. On the opposite side, there were also some friends of the players from Pete's team, and Bob knew most of them. Further away was the Borussia coaches who sat with their substitutes. There was a man who captured the game with a video camera. He was probably an employee of Borussia.

Just as he was about to ask Krautbauer about him, Bob noticed a movement behind a window in the red changing room. That room was used by the Borussia players. A face appeared behind the window pane and then disappeared. Bob fixed his eyes on the window, but nothing came up. Or was he wrong? Actually nobody had gone into the rooms since the beginning of the game. But Bob had secretly hoped for such an observation. Maybe there was one of those strange pranks going on here again.

"I need to go to the bathroom," he said to the girls. They nodded and kept following the game. Bob jogged along the left touchline to the other side of the pitch. He hadn't seen anyone enter the building, but he hadn't paid any attention to it. Bob was annoyed at his negligence. A few metres in front of the building, the detective turned around again. No one seemed to notice him, as everyone was watching the game.

Bob quickly slipped through the right door into the red changing room. He found himself in a narrow corridor from which there were two doors. He immediately chose the first door and opened it slowly. It was the shower room, and there was just a little water dripping. Bob stepped in carefully and looked briefly into the shower cubicles. He tried to keep an eye on the door, after all, he didn't want to be unpleasantly surprised. The shower room were clearly empty. Quietly he went out and closed the door behind him. So there was only the second room left.

Bob went to the next door and opened a gap. It was the changing room. Pants and T-shirts hung on the coat hooks and over the benches. It was the players' private clothes. Of course, the jerseys were on. Slowly Bob pushed himself into the room and threw a scrutinizing glance around. Nobody seemed to be here either. The windows were closed. Was he so wrong? But no, he was sure he saw someone. Bob began to examine the clothes closely. They were all right so far, at least none were cut up. Actually, they were just ordinary sweatshirts worn by the famous players.

Suddenly Bob flinched. A barely perceptible scratching ripped him from his investigation. The whole time he had the clear feeling that he was not alone. The person he saw earlier had to be somewhere here, especially when there was apparently no other exit. For seconds Bob remained motionless and listened. But he heard only the muffled voices from outside.

Just as he was about to start examining the clothes again, his gaze caught on the back wall of the room. Frightened, he realized that it was a sliding partition that covered part of the

room. His tension increased. What might be behind it? Bob left the clothes and slowly walked towards the sliding partition. He took a deep breath to keep calm. But his heart pounded violently.

He didn't think about what to say when someone was behind the partition, or how he should act. He just wanted to know. With a jerk he pushed the sliding door to the side. But there was no one there. In front of him, a narrow room opened that was completely empty.

Only on the opposite wall, maybe three metres away from Bob, there were several high lockers. They were closed. Bob thought someone could easily hide inside one of them. He wanted to check it out, but then, all of a sudden, courage left him. He didn't dare to go any further and became aware of his situation. Why would he sneak around here like a burglar? How should he, Bob, spend his time in the changing room of FC Borussia if he were suddenly caught. They'd immediately suspect him of doing something here.

His courage fell into fear. Bob took a step back, turned around and left the changing room in a hurry. He closed the door and went quickly to the exit. Carefully, he opened a gap on the outer door. He looked out. The game was still in progress.

A sharp voice behind him startled him. "What are you doing here?"

Bob turned around scared. A man in the dark jacket stood in the corridor. It was Mr Toll, the marketing manager of the hotel. His eyes sparkled. "Haven't I seen you before?"

"Uh... yeah," stuttered Bob. "I write for the *Los Angeles Times*."

"Oh, yeah, that's right." The man's voice became a little calmer. And he changed his tone. "May I ask what you're doing here?"

"I just wanted to go to the bathroom," Bob replied.

"Oh, I see. You'll have to go over there to the hotel. This is the players' changing room. And after the little incident yesterday—as you probably already know—I take great care that no strangers come in here. You'll have to excuse me."

Bob nodded. "Yes, of course. Goodbye, Mr Toll."

He held out his hand. "Goodbye, Mr Andrews, if I'm not mistaken?"

Bob nodded. "Yes, Bob Andrews."

When Bob stepped out of the building, the shock was still in his limbs. His first reaction was to walk directly back to Elizabeth and Kelly. But first he had to justify his white lie. Mr Toll might have been watching him. So he went towards the hotel.

In the reception hall, the hotel porter nodded to him. Bob walked straight to the toilet and locked up behind him. He had to calm down first.

Soon the excitement subsided. Bob was already annoyed about himself because he was so easily upset and couldn't control himself better. Actually, everything was explainable. Mr Toll had to check the side of the story with the cut jersey. But somehow the encounter with the marketing manager made him suspicious.

Where did Toll come from all of a sudden? There were only these two rooms, and Bob had checked both. Had Mr Toll been hiding in one of the lockers? But why? Maybe because Toll had heard him? Or had Toll been laying in wait for him? Did he think he was the saboteur?

Bob washed his hands and came out of the toilet into the reception hall. It was perfectly calm. The porter had got company now. A grey-haired man in his mid-forties, presumably the hotel manager, was telling him that one of the maids hasn't shown up for work.

"Now that I have the football players here, of all times," the man complained to the porter as if he could solve his problems. He obviously hadn't noticed Bob's presence yet. The porter carefully pointed in Bob's direction.

His boss turned around and fell silent.

"I hear your maid ran away," Bob took charge of the situation. "Allow me, Bob Andrews, *Los Angeles Times*."

"My name is Burt, I'm the manager here," the man said. "Yes, that's right. And she's not coming back, I just got off the phone with her."

"Maybe I can help you," Bob said. "A friend of mine is studying hotel management and looking for a temporary job."

"Well, maybe that's an idea." Burt was thinking. He didn't seem disinclined. "You can ask your friend to come over."

"No problem at all. She'll be in touch with you shortly." Bob said goodbye and left the hotel for the pitch.

"You've been gone a long time," Elizabeth said, irritated.

"I'll explain later," Bob murmured. He was about to tell Kelly about the job when Krautbauer patted him on the shoulder. "You really missed something! Your friend scored a goal! And what a hammer! Cross from the right, Crenshaw moved wonderfully away from Schmitt, then a screamer from a good ten metres, and Kühn in the goal has no chance."

Bob smiled proudly. "What's the score?"

"5-1," Krautbauer said.

The referee blew the whistle for half time. Both teams made their way to their rooms. Pete turned around and waved over. Kelly threw him a kissing hand and then stretched her thumb up to show her satisfaction.

"You must be his girlfriend," Krautbauer asked.

"Yeah, and I play football, too."

"And not bad at all," Elizabeth added, "You must know that football is more of a women's sport here in the US."

Krautbauer looked at Kelly in astonishment. America, he obviously thought, was always good for several surprises.

Bob grinned. Since Krautbauer was now talking with the girls about football, he concentrated on the situation in the changing rooms. The substitute players from Borussia came out and started to warm up. The other players soon followed.

The second half involved many substitutions. First Klinger, Sommer, Strasser, then other players went off, even the goalkeeper made room for the substitute.

Krautbauer was there all the time with Bob, Kelly and Elizabeth and became more and more talkative. The Beach Boys were increasingly running out of energy. So the final result was 9-1, courtesy of several more goals from Julio da Elba.

"Nice game," Krautbauer said to Bob. "Glad to meet you. I'll see if I can get to the coach or one of the players." Gallantly, he bowed to Kelly and Elizabeth. Maybe now he could finally talk to Kelly and tell her about the job placement.

But at that moment Pete came jogging, totally sweaty, but radiant. He fell around Kelly's neck and knocked Bob on his back.

"Julio..." he said and took a breath, "... Julio da Elba just came to me and said that I had a lot of talent." He puffed. "And that I should keep working on myself. And don't lose the fun in everything, he said." No doubt, Pete was happy. He was in football heaven.

But someone has to keep a cool head, Bob thought, and suddenly he ran off across the playing field. He saw something sensational seemed to be going on just outside Borussia's changing room.

5. Concealed Fouls

The players from FC Borussia stood close together. As Bob approached, he noticed that they were spellbound following an argument. In their midst, Elba and Franke, the coach, had clashed loudly. Elba swung a sweatshirt violently through the air. Bob crowded past some players to get a better view. Elba held the garment in front of Franke. Now Bob could see it well, too. The sweatshirt had a black animal sprayed on it. It looked like a cat. But that wasn't all. Two thick lines crossed the picture.

"Only you know about this," Elba spoke in English to Franke. His voice almost rolled over.

Franke also replied in English, but spoke very quietly. He apparently tried to calm Elba down. Bob could barely understand. When Elba had calmed down a bit, Franke sent the other players back to the changing room.

"What happened?" Bob asked the player closest to him.

"Someone painted a cat on his shirt," he replied briefly and wanted to follow the others into the building.

"And what did Elba mean?" Bob kept him up.

"I don't know!"

So something had happened after all. Bob ran back to Elizabeth, Kelly and Pete, who were engrossed in a lively conversation and had not noticed anything about the incident.

"Did you get an autograph?" Kelly greeted him.

"No, but someone left an autograph. On Elba's shirt. He's pretty out of his depth right now." Bob told them what he had seen and heard.

Pete shook his head. "I don't understand how anyone could provoke such a nice player. I can't imagine that he's done anyone any harm."

Kelly agreed with him. "Really, a strange story," she thought. "Sure, when someone messes up your T-shirt, you react violently—especially if you've had your jersey cut before. But do you freak out like that? Somehow there must be more to it than just that. What did he mean by 'only you know about this'? And what's that cat for?"

"Maybe you can figure it out soon," Bob said.

Kelly looked at him in surprise. "Why me?"

"Because I have a job for you after all! Housekeeping at the Sports Hotel!" Bob grinned. "I just spoke to the hotel owner. A maid left suddenly today. And then I told him that I had a good acquaintance, studied hotel management and was looking for a temporary job."

"Hotel management?" Kelly looked at Bob in amazement. "I'm still at high school!"

Bob shook his head disapprovingly. "My dear Kelly, you'll improvise a little. And you're pretty good at bed-making, aren't you?" He grinned at her.

Before Kelly could respond, Elizabeth interfered. "Sure, Bob can't apply anyway. Because his bed always looks like a battlefield."

"Right," Pete agreed with her. "He prefers to sleep in his sleeping bag for simplicity's sake."

"You better take a shower, Pete," Bob said. "But be careful not to let too much of your newly acquired fame flake off."

Pete grinned. "It's much more durable to be taken off by a shower!" Then he trotted away.

Kelly said goodbye. "I'll apply for the job then," she said.

"Okay," said Elizabeth. "I'll wait for you."

When Bob and Pete came to Headquarters in the afternoon in a good mood, they met a highly concentrated Jupiter bent over the computer.

Pete curiously bent over Jupiter's shoulder and looked at the screen. "'And so I would warn you all against the practices of this cult'," he read. "'from their skilful recruiting methods, but above all from their goals'." He took a short break. "Gee, so I can see that you've already written five pages! That's quite a bit of text!"

Jupiter stopped typing. "How can I concentrate with your chatter," he snapped at Pete.

Bob interfered. "Jupe, what is the meaning of this? Cult? Recruiting methods?"

Jupiter leaned back. "I'm writing an article for the school paper," he explained. "Read it yourself." Jupiter sent the document to print.

Pete pulled page after page out of the printer. "You and your girlfriend were out in town after an appointment," he reported for Bob what he read. "Why don't you just write her name? It was Lys, wasn't it?"

Jupe gave him an annoyed look. Pete further summarized the text. "So you were asked if you wanted to see a current movie for free, and since you had time, you went there. In the cinema hall, you encountered a very strange atmosphere and you as an exact and good observer—uh, Jupe, don't you want to leave out the good observer? Self-praise smells so bad..."

Jupiter pulled the notes out of his hand. "Bob should read it," he explained.

Bob grinned at Pete, leaned over the article and continued reading. "Well, you, as, um... an exact and good observer, immediately noticed that it was an event of the Futurio cult. You watched the movie anyway and got involved in a discussion about Futurio afterwards, in which the cult played itself out as the saviour of mankind, so to speak. They asked for your addresses, and invited you to some courses that should make it easier for you to start your professional life, and so on."

"That's how it was," Jupiter said. "It's a bad trick to catch people. It's dishonest. I did some research in the library and on the Internet. Look on page four. Everything that they promise sounds very clean—too clean and too perfect to be implemented in real life. They claim to be able to make all people happy with their methods. Everyone, mind you, that means world domination. Everyone should think the same, otherwise they are not happy and ultimately not real people. But what's worse is how they deal with their opponents. Lawsuits in court are still the most harmless thing—otherwise slander, blackmail... They say that they will 'clean up' the planet Earth. For me it's more of a threat!"

"I always use soap to clean," Bob said. "More cleaning is unhealthy."

"I think so too," Jupiter agreed with him. "And that's why I'm going to warn our classmates about these people. The supporters of Futurio are apparently already involved in more companies and organizations than you might imagine. I'll call Dave from the school paper later. Maybe he'll get this in the next issue."

"If there's still room," Bob said and looked doubtfully at the many pages. "Or Dave will issue a special edition." Jupiter threw the dust rag at him.

"Let's report," Pete intervened. Jupiter grinned and nodded.

Pete's report was extremely detailed. Every detail was important to him—the coach's instructions before the game, the kick-off, Elba's fast goals...

Bob waited patiently, he knew what the climax of Pete's report was headed for—his glorious shot on goal.

"Kühn in goal hardly had time to react," Pete explained. "But he's a super goalkeeper, and he flew into the right corner. Still, he didn't stand a chance. My shot came too high. Well, that's football!"

"How was that for self-praise?" Jupiter asked smugly.

"Okay, okay," Pete admitted.

Then it was Bob's turn. He reported on his visit to the changing room and his encounter with Toll.

Jupiter interrupted him. "You've made yourself suspicious."

"As a matter of fact, I did," Bob said. "Especially when you know how the story goes on. Because during the game, a cat was sprayed on Elba's shirt. You won't believe the way things have got out of hand. Elba was furious."

"Maybe it was Toll himself," Pete interjected.

Bob smiled. "Sure, it could have been him. I don't like him anyway, but why would he of all people do that?"

Even Jupiter was not convinced. "He probably also tried to ambush the perpetrator. Did you see anything else, Bob?" He pointed to Bob's hand. "What kind of black spot is that, anyway?"

"Oh, that!" Bob held his hand up. "I thought I got some oil in the locker rooms. It didn't wash completely."

"It could also be colour," Jupiter said calmly. "Colour spray."

Pete took the thought immediately. "Somehow you must have touched the sprayed garment. Or the can itself. Don't you remember that?"

Bob shook his head. "No, I can't remember."

"Okay," Juve summed up. "There are enough suspects—Mr Toll and all the players, including the coaches, who left the changing room just before the game—if it happened in the first half, before Bob's visit. We can't rule that out, since you haven't examined all the garments. Of course, if it happened after that, all the players who have been substituted are suspects."

"... If there hasn't been another unknown visitor," said Pete.

Jupiter rocked his head. "Anyway," he murmured. "The decisive harmony in the team and especially between the coach and the players are showing cracks. The goals that Borussia wanted to achieve with this trip to California seem to be reversed."

Bob said he was right. "If this mood continues like that, they could collapse in the second half of the season. A divided team doesn't play well."

"That would be a real shame," Pete said. "I just had a new favourite team."

"It's not just a shame," Jupiter relented. "After all, football is also about money—a lot of money. It's a million dollar game—the German league, the European competition, a lot depends on it! Television money, advertising revenues and sponsorship money only flow if they are successful. Otherwise, even a dream team can dissolve very quickly. Imagine what happens if Elba leaves. Other players may not stay either."

Bob slipped excitedly back and forth on his armchair. "Maybe we're on a very hot case. A cut-up jersey and a sprayed sweatshirt—small and harmless items that have a huge effect. It's an off-pitch foul on a player, so to speak."

Jupiter nodded. "Evil fouls. Only what opponent is in play here? We desperately need more information."

"No problem," Pete said, and he told Jupiter about Kelly's new temporary job. "She's talking to Mr Toll right now."

"Ingenious," Jupiter said. "But Kelly, like us, only has a week's school vacation!"

"If we can get the case resolved in a week," Pete replied, "then she can quit the job."

Jupiter nodded: "Well yes. But you're starting to get a little too independent for me. After all, we should at least decide things together."

Bob was annoyed. "If you mean Kelly's involvement, sometimes you have to take advantage of the opportunities when they come up. Besides, you haven't even thought it was a case yet!"

Jupiter had to agree with him. "Okay, but this is different now."

6. The Missing Brother

Mr Toll, the Sports Hotel's marketing manager, was also responsible for hiring staff. He received Kelly in his tidy, almost empty office. He wore a dark blue jacket and a tie patterned with small tennis rackets, and he seemed to be in a good mood.

Kelly had prepared for the interview. In a super-fast course by telephone she had learned some basic rules of the work from a friend who was working in a hotel. She had especially memorized the technical terms. In addition, she prepared some questions which she wanted to ask, in order to give the impression to Toll that she knew the work well.

As it turned out, she could have saved herself the trouble and the telephone call. Mr Toll just wanted to know a few more personal things—whether she still lived at home, how she liked her studies, what she wanted to do later, whether she was a politically-committed person, and whether she was involved in any sports. Kelly answered politely, but without revealing much about herself.

Mr Toll leaned back satisfied. "One last question. Can you help out at the restaurant from time to time?"

Kelly nodded. "Sure thing."

"Beautiful! You know—friendliness is our top priority. My first impression is that you will fit in here very well here." He smiled at Kelly. "And now I'd like you to meet Mrs Sculley, who runs the service area."

Mrs Sculley, a full-bodied woman in her mid-forties, shook Kelly's hand hard. No question about it—this woman had room service well under control. But still Kelly had a tough time. The rules in the Sports Hotel were so peculiar that Mrs Sculley explained everything to her in an endless torrent of words.

"It starts with the luxury single rooms here," Mrs Sculley explained.

Kelly was told in a loud, booming voice how to fold the blanket, what clothes to put away, what to leave behind, and how to leave the bathroom. Kelly didn't have to do more than just remember everything. However, this was not easy in view of the flood of explanations and instructions.

But Mrs Sculley nodded nicely to Kelly. "You'll be all right, girl," she said. "You look very smart. Tomorrow morning at six, you can start."

Kelly swallowed. That was early for the holidays.

So early in the morning, the beach was pretty empty. Pete had found his running rhythm. Some rain had fallen overnight, so that the sand was now firm enough to provide a good jogging surface. Pete loved to keep fit this way on the beach of Rocky Beach and at the same time let his thoughts run free. He thought of Kelly, who had got up even earlier and had to make her way for duty at the Sports Hotel.

At some distance another jogger approached him, someone who apparently also enjoyed running by the sea early in the morning. As he approached Pete, he saw that it was Julio da Elba. He recognized Pete as well and stopped.

"Hi!" The well-trained athlete was hardly out of breath.

“You’re the goal scorer from our training game last night. Not everyone scores such a goal against Kühn! Pete is your name, if I remember correctly?”

Pete nodded flattered. “Thank you for the praise. Especially when it comes from you.”

Elba smiled. “You can call me Julio. I’ve seen you before, by the way. You were standing on the other side of the hotel fence two days ago watching me train.”

“Yes, I’ve admired your game for a long time. We watch European football on cable TV. And the other day, I just had to watch you. It was dreamlike the way you control the ball.”

“Well, come on, Pete, I’ll buy you a cup of coffee. You just have to show me where.”

It was a lucky day for Pete. He pointed to a beach bar where he drank a Coke once in a while. “Why are you walking around here alone? Where are the other players?”

“We’ve been training a lot the last few days and this morning we have a free morning. I wanted to be left alone, so I went jogging,” Elba said.

They stepped into the bar and Pete ordered a milk coffee. Elba chose a cappuccino. They talked about football for a while. Pete was amazed how relaxed and normal Julio was. He had imagined a successful football star to be quite different. Still, something seemed to bother him. Did this have anything to do with the incidents at the training camp?

Pete steered the conversation to more personal topics. “Why are you called Elba? That’s more of an Italian than a Brazilian name, isn’t it?”

Julio had a sip of coffee. “My father is Italian,” he said. “He came to Brazil many years ago to study the inhabitants of the rainforests. He is a scientist, anthropologist, that is, he researches the history of mankind. That’s how he met my mother, who lived in a small village in the jungle. They moved to Brasilia and got married. And had two boys.”

“You have another brother?”

Elba sighed. “Yes, he is three years older than me. But I haven’t seen him in a long time.”

Pete was wondering if he should follow up. On the other hand he wanted to bring the topic slowly to the incidents at the Sports Hotel. But Julio has already spoken ahead. Pete seemed to have triggered a memory stream.

“Alberto, that’s my brother’s name, went into the wood business and made a lot of money. But at the same time he withdrew more and more from me. I was sad because when we were kids, we got along so well. We played a lot together. I was his little brother and his best buddy...”

He stopped for a moment. Pete didn’t interrupt him.

“For a while we were on a research trip with our parents and lived in tents and huts in the middle of the jungle. You get a lot out of it when you’re a kid. It was a beautiful time. We could totally rely on each other.” He smiled thoughtfully.

“By the way, we played football with balls made of braided branches. That’s how I started.”

“So that’s where you got your legendary ball control from? And your brother, does he play as well as you do?”

Julio shook his head. “Alberto wasn’t as ambitious, as crazy as I was. We got older and he became more and more involved with the wood business.”

“All that money probably changed him,” Pete threw in.

“No, it wasn’t that, actually. Alberto kept isolating himself more and more until he finally disappeared completely. It wasn’t just the money. See, I’m rich today, too, but I still know a lot of my friends from the old days. I always see them when I’m home in Brazil. We get together like I never left. He on the other hand changed his circle of friends completely. He’s got new friends, strange people, and he only cared about them.”

Pete started to get curious. “What kind of people were they?”

But the Brazilian waved off. “Let’s stop, I don’t want to be reminded of it.” Elba looked sadly out through the window to the sea.

“All right, Julio, let’s talk about something else.” Pete decided to make a surprising change of topic. “What kind of cat was that sprayed on your shirt?”

Elba spun around. Pete had hit the mark. “What do you know about the shirt?”

Pete looked at Julio as faithfully as possible. “Bob told me. A friend. He overheard your quarrel with Mr Franke after the friendly match ended.”

“It’s an internal affair,” Julio replied. That’s all he said.

“Julio, if you’re in trouble, maybe we can help you.”

“You? Who are you?” Elba asked.

Pete smiled embarrassed and pulled a business card out of his pocket. “Well, you know, we’re detectives. Bob, which I told you about, then Jupiter and me. We call ourselves The Three Investigators and we investigate anything. Almost anything, at least.”

Pete handed over the card. It said:



Julio read them and smiled. “How much do you charge?”

“We don’t take any fee,” Pete proudly explained. But then he remembered something. “If we can help you, then you can reward us with a little penalty kick training.”

Julio patted Pete on the shoulder. “I’ll think it over. But now I have to go on, I’m meeting a business partner.”

Pete listened. “A player’s agent,” he asked into the blue. “Do you want to change clubs?”

“No, no. But you never know. I don’t even know these people yet. It is a recruitment agency. They contacted me.” Julio pulled out a business card. Pete noticed the logo. It was a blue globe.

Julio put the card back and put some coins on the table. “Come on, let’s go.”

“Thanks for the coffee!” Pete cried.

They left the bar. Pete looked thoughtfully behind Julio, who ran light-footed over the sand.

7. Red Card for Bob

When Pete entered Headquarters, he met an angry Jupiter. "Imagine, Pete, Dave refused to print my article about Futurio. He was talking around, here and there and this and that. I think he's scared."

"Of what?"

"From their lawyers, from anonymous threats. He knows that Futurio is aggressive, even if the organization pretends to be a harmless faith community."

"I thought you mentioned that in your article," Pete said.

Jupiter nodded. "Of course! Anyway, Dave refused, and of course he can decide. What am I supposed to do now? We must warn against these people. And if everyone doesn't have the guts, we can give up now."

Pete agreed with him. They kept silent at a loss. When the door opened and Bob came in, they both immediately had the same thought. "Bob's father," Jupiter and Pete shouted together and looked at each other.

Bob looked irritated. "What kind of greeting is that? It's me, Bob, not my father!"

"Sure, Bob," grinned Juve. "You don't look that old after all. Pete and I both thought about your father. It is regarding my Futurio article. Maybe he could have it printed in the *Los Angeles Times* as a letter to the editor. What happened was that Dave refused to print it in the school paper. I think he's scared."

"Oh, yeah," Bob said and nodded. "I'll be happy to ask my father." Then he pulled a fax out of his pocket. "Here, take a look. That's what the newspapers in Germany are saying today. And that's only from the English language reports. Who knows how much more details are in the German papers?"

Bob sat down in an armchair. "My father gave it to me. The German journalists heard the story about the sprayed cat. Somebody told them about the cut jersey, too. This morning the players were off and some met with the journalists. Now the press is hunting around, annoying the players and blowing up the story as a huge thing. As we know, there is a mid-season break for football there, and the media are throwing themselves at such things. Even a television station has reported this."

Jupiter smiled briefly. "Just what we suspected," he said. "The story is gaining momentum. Now the media hype begins. Team psychology is almost irreparable."

Pete pulled up an eyebrow. "Team psychology? What do you non-athletes know about it?"

Jupiter looked at him at an angle. "I don't have to play in such an exquisite top team like you do, Pete, to understand something about group dynamics. After all, there are examples in all areas of how things can suddenly go wrong once the relationship within the group is disturbed. Something like this happens not only in sport, but also in politics, in school... You just have to be able to read the processes. And do a little thinking..."

Bob stared at the ceiling. Jupiter's talk got on his nerves. "Teacher, I also know an example," he said and snapped his hand up as if he wanted to speak at school. "There are three guys running a detective agency together. If one of them is constantly giving clever

lectures, it annoys the others so much that the whole cooperation comes to a standstill.” He laughed when he saw Jupiter’s speechless face.

“It’s all right, Jupe,” Bob relented. “You’re right, in principle. Imagine how miserable we would fail if we fought all the time and none of us trusted each other.”

Pete nodded. “Even our girlfriends couldn’t shake our team spirit.”

“Because luckily everyone found a nice one,” Jupiter said. “Amazingly, even you, Bob,” he pointedly added.

“But back to the newspapers. Bob, how do the Germans explain this story?”

“They believe that there are hidden rivalries within the team. The coach and trainers also gets involved in the conversations.”

“Rivalries... Players who are overshadowed by Elba are jealous and would not want him to succeed,” Jupe said. “It’s a possible explanation but certainly not the only one. Let’s see what Kelly says later. She has her first duty this morning and will come here afterwards.”

“But that’s not all,” Bob said. Pete and Jupiter looked at him expectantly.

“I, Bob Andrews, am banned from the Sports Hotel!”

“Banned? They showed you the red card?” Pete asked incredulously.

“Did you misbehave as usual?” Jupiter joked, but then he got serious. “Are they suspecting you of something?”

“Yes, I think so. I wasn’t given any reason but I suspect that it was because Mr Toll caught me in the locker rooms when the cat was sprayed on... My father would be furious.”

“We’ve been keeping your father pretty busy by now,” Jupiter remarked.

Pete took the floor. “I also had an interesting encounter today.” He talked about his conversation with Julio, about the story of his lost brother and about Elba’s meeting with a player agent.

Jupiter pinched his lower lip. After a few seconds, he let himself be heard again.

“Another motive appears—poaching.”

Bob frowned. “What do you mean by poaching?”

“It could be that another club wants to sign Julio da Elba. The only problem is that Elba feels very comfortable with Borussia. He doesn’t want to leave. Money doesn’t attract him either and everything looks shiny and sporty. So the other club has to rattle Borussia—trying to divide the coach and the players. To make it easier for Elba to break away from his team. And apparently it could just work.”

Bob nodded. “The journalists haven’t figured it out yet.”

“Which doesn’t mean we should reject the jealousy theory,” Jupiter said. “We must think in all directions.”

“The story about the missing brother is also interesting,” Bob murmured.

Jupiter smiled at Bob and turned to Pete. “Do you actually have the list of players that have been substituted at half time?”

Pete nodded and handed Jupiter a sheet of paper. “Klinger, Strasser, Sommer, Lukas, Kunze, Ruzzero, Kühn,” Jupe read aloud.

“That should be them,” Pete said. “I don’t think I forgot any. They all went in earlier to the changing room and had the opportunity to spray the jersey.”

“But don’t they give each other an alibi?” Bob asked.

Pete shook his head. “There were always a few minutes in between. The players usually go to the changing room immediately, take a quick shower, change their clothes and then come out again. Each of them could have been alone in the locker room for a few minutes.”

Jupiter added the name of the marketing manager to the list of suspects. Then he added a question mark if another person managed to enter the changing room unobserved. “Too bad,

Bob, you didn't watch the door all the time."

"I also cheered for Pete once in a while," Bob replied. "To get him going. But wait a minute. There was a man who recorded the game with a video camera. There might be a clue if they watch that video."

"Well, I would expect that video to be focussed on the match itself. Besides, there are cameras everywhere," Pete agreed. "They should have got some useful clue recorded for sure."

8. Kelly's Discovery

Kelly arrived at the Sports Hotel on time at six in the morning. What could she possibly have done to help the investigators?

The attendant at the reception reached for the phone and called Mrs Sculley who came to meet Kelly. Together they went to the hotel. Then Mrs Sculley introduced Kelly to the other maid—Doria Eichhorn, a German who immigrated to the US with her parents a few years ago. She gave Kelly a friendly laugh.

“Well Kelly, you know now,” Mrs Sculley concluded, “First you prepare breakfast, and then when the guests come down, you go tidy up the rooms. Doria will help you at the beginning. Just a reminder, get your paws off their private things! The guests’ private things are none of our business. However, if you notice anything, please let me know immediately. You may have known that there’s been some unrest here in the last few days.” Kelly nodded.

Mrs Sculley looked at her wristwatch. “Well, I’ll leave you to Doria now. Afterwards you have to hurry with the rooms because the footballers have a free morning today. You never know if they go back to their rooms right after breakfast.”

Mrs Sculley turned to Doria. “Please make Klinger’s room together. Show Kelly everything there is to do again. The next rooms in this corridor are to be cleaned by Kelly alone. Take care!”

Together with Doria, everything went on smoothly. Kelly was amazed at how much one could learn about the guests from their rooms. Klinger’s room was very messy—shoes were scattered all over the place, the bedspread was on the floor, scented water, brushes and towels were scattered in the bathroom.

“That’s perfectly normal,” Doria said, shaking her brown curls. “These football millionaires are really like little kids.”

They had a lot of work to do here. While Doria was still taking care of the bathroom, Kelly cleaned the other parts of the room with a dust cloth, hoping she might discover something interesting.

But Kelly did not notice anything suspicious. Klinger, in any case, was not very sympathetic to chambermaids. Even if one paid in the hotel for the room to be cleaned, one did not have to mess the whole place up like he did.

“Chaos,” Kelly growled as they left the room.

Doria nodded. “The other rooms along here are for you. Just do it the same way.” She grinned mischievously. “You’ll be amazed in the next room!”

This next room belonged to Strasser. When Kelly opened the door, she couldn’t believe her eyes. After Klinger’s room, she was prepared for anything. But, to her surprise, there was absolute order here. Even the bed was meticulously smoothed and made up.

She closed the door behind her and looked in the bathroom. Here, too, everything was in its place. The toiletries were sorted nicely in a special case.

While Kelly wiped the desk a little, she pushed some magazines aside. Among them, several papers came to light. Kelly took a closer look.

They were letters—two handwritten private letters in German, one business letter in English with a striking company logo. The name of the company was Business World the

logo was a circular blue globe. Kelly tried to memorize it. That's when she heard footsteps in the corridor. She quickly pushed the papers back into their original order. But the footsteps outside went away. Kelly didn't really have anything much to do here and left the room.

Next came Franke's room, the coach's room. In Kelly's cleanliness assessment it was roughly between Klinger and Strasser. There was a disorder here but was manageable because Kelly didn't really have a thing for people that were too meticulous. First she cleaned the bathroom and changed a towel. Then she made the bed. There were two books on desserts, a non-fiction book about sports psychology and a famous espionage novel by John le Carré. So, Franke was into reading—there were more books on the desk.

To put the TV remote back next to the TV, Kelly had to move a chair with a jacket hanging on it. When she pulled the chair around, suddenly an object fell to the ground. Kelly flinched. On the floor, a long metal can slowly rolled away. It stopped just under the bed. Kelly bent over and took the can carefully in his hand. It was a spray paint can—and the colour was black.

Kelly was feverishly thinking. What did Franke want with a spray paint can? Of course, the black cat on Elba's jersey had been sprayed on. Was that done with this spray can? Was Franke the culprit? What was she going to do? Inform Mrs Sculley? Or save the evidence and have The Three Investigators handle it? Again she heard footsteps in the corridor.

She had to hurry up to put the can back. But it was too late. The room door opened. Jochen Franke looked directly into her eyes.

Then his gaze fell on the can Kelly was holding with her trembling hand. Franke understood immediately. Slowly, he approached Kelly.

“And, Kelly, how did it go?” Jupiter, Pete and Bob were eager to know.

Kelly paused intentionally. She enjoyed being at the centre of attention.

“Go, Kelly,” demanded Jupiter. “Don't make it so exciting. You can be sure of our applause.”

“All right.” Kelly threw her hair back. “It got a little uncomfortable. Franke came closer and yelled at me for what I was doing in his room. He tried to take the can from me and grabbed me by the arm.”

Kelly pulled up the sleeve of her sweatshirt. “Here, I even got a bruise!”

Pete jumped up and looked at Kelly's arm. Angrily, he mumbled, “I'll show him, the creep.”

Kelly continued with her report: “I resisted and held the can. Then luckily, Mrs Sculley showed up and asked what was going on.”

“And then?” Jupiter wanted to know.

“And then I was speechless. Franke accused me of deliberately putting the can in his room. He claimed that he caught me red-handed. That guy's pretty devious.”

“Did this monkey get away with it?” Pete asked and let go of Kelly's arm again. Obviously, by the bruise on Kelly's arm, he had fundamentally changed his mind about Franke.

Kelly leaned against Pete and stroked his hair. “Mrs Sculley took the can and told Franke not to get upset. This thing would work out. Then she took me to see Mr Burt, the hotel manager. Mr Toll was also called in.

“I should tell you everything in detail. Mr Toll was always nervous and asking confusing questions, but Mr Burt calmed him down. Most importantly, they believed me. Where was I

supposed to hide that can with me? I didn't have a bag when I walked through the rooms. And that can was pretty big."

"So that's where we got the culprit," Pete shouted. "I never would have thought of him! Franke seemed like a nice guy. But we've been wrong a lot of times. Why did he do that?"

Jupe was lost in thought. "Interesting," he grumbled to himself. Then he calmly said, "Slowly, slowly, Pete. Don't let a bruise on Kelly's arm make you jump to a quick conclusion."

Pete and Bob looked at him questioningly.

Jupiter continued: "Maybe it was actually Franke. But that doesn't mean we know why he did it. That's what we should find out first. Who knows what other story is behind it and what role he plays in it?" Jupiter took a little break. "And maybe it wasn't Franke at all."

Pete had his say. "But what about Julio's story? Franke was the only one who knew about this strange story. Then there was the cut jersey. I myself saw him peek out of the changing room building. And now the spray can is in his room!"

Jupiter shook his head. "You said maybe it was coach Franke, but the distance was too great for you to be sure. With regards to Julio's story that only Franke supposedly knows, I'm afraid I have no explanation for that. We need to figure out what this is about first. But the spray can could have been hidden in Franke's room by someone else."

"And I happened to find it there," Kelly concluded.

"Yes," Jupiter said. "For a neutral person to find it—the chambermaid. This makes the suspicion all the stronger on the coach."

"And for Franke, it actually looked as if Kelly had hidden the can in his room," Bob remarked. "That explains his harsh reaction."

Pete shook his head. "Don't think too much about 'could' or 'would'. I think he did it. And we should figure out why he's playing this game."

The phone rang. It was Mr Andrews who called from the editorial office and wanted to speak to his son. Bob turned on the phone's loudspeaker so everyone could hear.

"Bob, you can go back to the Sports Hotel," reported Mr Andrews. "I was just about to call and complain about the ban, when Mr Toll called me. He apologized and said there had been new developments and you were free from any suspicion. What's going on?"

Bob told him the incident with Franke.

"Well, go on, then, Bob," his father said. "That smells like a hot story. And say hello to the other boys, especially Jupiter. I had his letter about Futurio checked by our lawyer and he changed a few small points... uh, slightly shortened. If Jupiter wants, I'll have the letter printed tomorrow morning."

"Jupiter is nodding, Dad," Bob said.

"Okay, bye!"

"See you, Dad. And thank you!"

Jupiter looked very pleased. "The Three Investigators are progressing well on this case," he said. "We've got Kelly on site. And Bob is back. And maybe," he looked at Pete, "we should take up our idea earlier and look at the video recordings of the security system. I'm sure they've already checked that at the hotel, but maybe they missed something—some clue, a little something. That would be one thing for our intrusion specialist, wouldn't it, Pete?"

"Theoretically no problem," nodded Pete. "But isn't that a little dangerous?"

9. The Secret Code

When Kelly entered the dining room in the evening, she immediately felt that the atmosphere was tense. Not a trace of the cheerful and jocular get-together of the players, of which Doria had told her about. Most players sat quietly together and waited for the dinner to begin. Kelly was assigned to serve that night. She walked down the tables and asked for the drinks they wanted.

Mr Schaffer, the manager of Borussia, sat aside and had a lively conversation with Strasser, one of the team's spokesmen. Kelly approached them.

"What would you like to drink?" she asked.

Mr Schaffer interrupted the conversation. "Water," he said. "And I also need a nice red wine. *Chianti* would be best."

"Very well. And you, sir?"

"A bottle of water, please," Strasser said.

At the next table, there were also only two men sitting—Franke and Klinger. They spoke very quietly and didn't notice Kelly until she asked for the drinks. Franke noticed her said something in German. It didn't sound very friendly. Mrs Sculley, who noticed, instructed Doria to serve Franke's table from now on. Kelly was grateful to her for that.

Now it was time for Kelly to turn to her other secret assignment. She had to figure out the way to the hotel's security office, and she suspected that it had to be in the basement of the hotel.

Doria had told Kelly that the video camera lines led there. Once there had been a brawl at the reception and the perpetrators were caught later based on the video recordings. Probably the recordings were kept in that locked room for a while before they were transferred elsewhere.

The Three Investigators wanted to wait outside the hotel for Kelly after her shift. Pete might then venture to the security office in the late evening.

Kelly saw Doria pick up forks and knives at the cutlery table. "Hi, Doria. Thank you for serving Franke."

"It goes without saying. He's really mad at you for the incident," Doria said. "Pretty thick air here tonight."

Kelly nodded. "Yes, I could feel it as well. Say, Mr Schaffer just ordered a good *Chianti*. Should I get it from the wine cellar?"

"If you're looking for a good one, then yes. Get the *La Vialla*."

"How do I get to the basement?" Kelly asked.

"I can go with you and show you the wine cellar."

"It's okay. There's enough to do up here. I just want to know where it is, so I don't confuse it with the security office and set off an alarm."

"You won't confuse the rooms. Next to the door of the security office there is a keypad for the security code. The wine cellar is just opposite the security office." Then Doria smiled mischievously. "Are you more interested in the wine cellar or the security office?"

Kelly blushed and ignored the question. "Thank you, Doria. I'll be back in a few minutes."

A few moments later, Kelly walked through the heavy steel door to the basement. She turned on the lights and went down the stairs. At the foot of the stairs, she reached a corridor that branched left and right. She chose the right side and it led to a steel sliding door with the keypad embedded in the wall. Now only chance could help. Maybe someone would just go to the security office and type in the code.

As Doria had described, the wine cellar was opposite and the door was unlocked. Kelly went in and turned on the lights. She quickly found the wine she wanted. Then she turned off the lights and opened a gap on the door. With one eye, she could see the illuminated corridor. The keyboard was right across the corridor. However, the numbers or characters were not clear from a distance.

Kelly thought two or three minutes was all she could spare in the wine cellar before anyone noticed her missing from her work upstairs. But nobody came. Time passed way too fast. She decided that she had to go back up.

Suddenly, she startled. Footsteps approached. She hoped it wasn't Doria or Mrs Sculley looking for her. But the steps were louder. Now Kelly could recognize the person. It was Mr Burt, the hotel manager. He stayed outside the door of the security office. Kelly barely dared to breathe.

Involuntarily she took a small step back into the darkness of the room. Burt looked around both sides. Then he keyed in the code into the keypad with his second finger. Pretty slow—probably he didn't want to mistype. Kelly tried to memorize the order—top centre, bottom right, bottom centre, top left, repeated it for herself.

The sliding door opened. Burt entered and went in. Kelly immediately turned on the lights in the cellar and pulled out her notepad and drew the order—top centre, bottom right, bottom centre, top left, that's how it must have been. Then she switched off the lights, stepped quietly into the corridor and closed the door behind her. She wanted to take a quick look at the keypad. There had to be time. But then she noticed a camera mounted directly above the wine cellar with its eye pointed right at the door to the security office.

So she had no choice but to get going quickly. Passing by, she glanced at the keys. Instead of numbers there were symbols—and something round in the middle, like a ball. Nice gag for a Sports Hotel, she thought.

Then Kelly heard Mrs Sculley calling. "Kelly, Kelly, are you missing?"

"I'm coming," Kelly replied. "I didn't find the wine right away. There are so many varieties there."

"Hurry up, Kelly," Mrs Sculley said when Kelly was upstairs. "You can't leave Doria alone that long."

It was already quite late in the evening and pitch dark. Kelly was still not out. Slowly The Three Investigators became impatient. After all, they've been waiting for over an hour. As a precaution, Bob's Beetle was parked at parking lot near a small intersection out of sight from the road which turned to the hotel.

The plan was that Jupiter would stay in Bob's car for the time being. Pete had already got out and walked through the forest. Now he should crouch down a little away from the entrance behind bushes and keep an eye on the area. Dressed all in black, he was barely visible in the dark.

"Maybe we should have just gone to Mr Toll and asked him to show us the videos," Bob said, and it wasn't the first time he thought about it. With his fingers, he drummed nervously on the steering wheel.

Jupiter took his feet off the rear cover and looked at Bob. “Bob, we’ve been through it all before. I don’t think they’d just let us into their security zone like that. Why would they trust us? And besides, we mostly investigate best on our own.”

“Yes, yes.” Bob continued to drum on the steering wheel. “Look! A car is coming,” he said suddenly.

Jupe turned around. “That must be Kelly!”

The lights were approaching. Kelly stopped right next to the Beetle and jumped out of the small car her mother had lent her for the job.

Jupiter gave himself a jolt, struggled to get out of the Beetle and went towards her. Kelly pressed a sheet of paper into his hand on which she had recorded the location of the security office. “The door is secured by a key code. I wrote down the combination.” She looked proudly at Jupiter.

“Thank you, Kelly,” Jupiter said. “Great job. Really.”

“Good luck,” Kelly replied. “I have to go. I have to get up again tomorrow at the crack of dawn. Say hello to Pete for me!”

Kelly’s car moved away. Jupiter walked around the car to Bob, who had cranked down the side window. A motorcycle drove by and turned into the access road to the hotel. Everything else was quiet.

“Well, then,” Jupiter said to Bob and turned on his flashlight. “As discussed, you take off in exactly ten minutes.”

Bob nodded. Jupiter jogged off.

10. The Masked Man Escapes

In the dark, Jupiter reached the hotel grounds through the forest within a few minutes. With the help of their secret Red-bellied Flycatcher bird call, he found Pete's hiding place without any problems. The Three Investigators frequently used this bird call to signal amongst themselves inconspicuously.

"Well, finally," Pete greeted him.

"All right, Pete. Kelly brought the plan. Anything suspicious here?"

"Nothing. Not a soul. Except that security booth there."

Jupiter looked over the grounds at the entrance security booth with the barrier. From there the access road led to the hotel. "A motorcycle should have just passed through," he said.

Pete shook his head. "Didn't see anyone on a motorcycle."

"Well, whatever. Maybe he's lost his way and turned back." Jupiter said as Pete shone his flashlight on Kelly's note. He read: "'Dear Pete! I've prepared everything. The centre window of the seminar room is opened and slightly ajar. You can go in there undisturbed. The security office is in the basement. See my drawing. I also wrote down the key code for you. Hopefully it's correct.' I hope so too, though," muttered Pete. "Otherwise there'll be a hell of an alarm."

He kept reading: "'By the way, there's a lot of thick air among the team. Well, good luck!—Kelly. PS: Watch out! A camera is mounted directly opposite the door to the security office. Just come up with something.' Hah! Can you think of anything else, Jupe?"

The First Investigator shook his head. "You have to go now, Pete. Here comes Bob's Beetle!"

In fact, the round lights of the Beetle were visible through the trees. Pete saw Bob stop the car in front of the entrance barrier, get out and go to the security booth and involve himself in a conversation.

Jupe nodded to Pete. "So, now the guard is distracted. As discussed, run past the back of the building onto the hotel grounds. It is dark enough there."

"Yes, First Investigator," Pete quipped.

"All right, go, buzz off, and good luck!"

Pete was about to run when suddenly, Jupiter held him by the arm. "Wait," he whispered. With his other hand, he pointed towards the entrance security booth.

Pete immediately saw what Jupiter meant. He froze. There was another visitor, who was also dressed all in black, the person slid past the security booth like a shadow—bent, with smooth, quick steps. Now the figure had already passed the barrier and was scurrying over the lawn towards the hotel.

"Damn, someone beat us to it!" Pete gasped. He looked over at the security booth. Bob was still engrossed in a conversation with the guard. The intruder was now maybe fifty metres from the hotel. What was he up to? And who was it?

Then Jupiter and Pete were shocked again. Glaring bright lights shone on the lawn making the scenery almost ghostly through the light fog.

“A motion detector!” said Jupiter. “The man walked into a motion detector and these floodlights went on. Pete, you’re lucky you’re not caught by it!”

The intruder stopped and stayed in the middle of the lawn. His contours were outlined by the bright lighting. Nothing happened for a moment, except that the light fog was drifting through the scene as if in slow motion. Then a door of the hotel opened. People showed up, shouts cut through the tense silence. The man in black turned around and ran back. But when he was out of the light cone, he suddenly changed direction. He did not run towards the security booth, but directly towards the high wire mesh fence. How will he get over there? The fence is much too high.

The man approached the fence with short but powerful steps. Then he jumped. He got a hold of the top edge and squirmed over. Skilfully, the man touched down on the other side.

Pete and Jupiter froze. The fugitive ran straight towards their hiding place. The detectives had no time to jump aside, because the man was already heading towards the bush. His foot caught Jupiter crouching on the ground and he tumbled forward.

Pete saw a huge, shiny wildcat grimace from the man. The collision with Jupiter caused him to tip over backwards. The predator’s face made a hissing sound. Pete clasped the opponent, but the black body elastically escaped from the not exactly weak arms of the Second Investigator.

Then Jupiter shot up and knocked the man to the ground again. Pete got a leg to grab and wouldn’t let go. The man in turn had Jupiter’s left arm firmly under control.

Jupiter stared into the dark eyes that sparkled over the fangs of the big cat’s face. With his free hand he tried to grab at the man’s garish mask. But with an incredibly skilful turn the intruder escaped this attack. Then he kicked out strongly with his free leg against Pete’s shoulder. Pete yelled out and had to let go.

The man was almost on his feet when Jupiter was given a corner of his jacket to grab. The opponent hit him on the wrist, so Jupe had to let him go. Smoothly the man jumped up and disappeared between the trees. Pete held his shoulder and breathed deeply. But Jupiter was already fuming about letting that man escape.

“Let’s just get out of here, Pete! The people from the hotel will show up soon. They still think we’re the intruder.”

Pete saw a piece of paper lying on the ground and he reached out and took it. Then he ran off. He heard Jupe panting behind him, but it wasn’t far to the parking lot.

Pete quickly reached the abandoned parking lot in the dark. Soon, Jupiter arrived, noticeably out of breath.

Jupiter stopped and wiped the sweat off his forehead. He looked around for possible pursuers. But no one was seen. Behind them in the woods, everything seemed quiet.

“Hopefully no one else is coming,” Pete said. “The undergrowth would be too dark for them.”

Jupiter nodded. “If they find us here, they’ll probably suspect us—especially since you’re also dressed in black, Pete.”

“I hope Bob gets here soon and picks us up,” Jupiter said.

“Yeah, the faster we get out of here the better,” Pete remarked. “We didn’t really achieve what we set out to do tonight.”

“Not necessarily. I think we’ve taken a step forward—though different from we wanted. Don’t be so discouraged, Pete.” Jupiter patted Pete on the back.

“Ow!” shouted Pete and held his shoulder. “It hurts! The cat man kicked my shoulder!”

“I didn’t know,” Jupiter apologized. “That’s a nice souvenir you’ve got there.”

Pete sat down on a tree stump. “You really can’t say that! Jupe, the case is getting more and more mysterious. A cut-up jersey may still be quite funny, but a nocturnal cat man kicking my shoulder is definitely going too far!”

“As a matter of fact, things are getting confusing,” Jupe said. “We should think about how the cat man fits into our picture.”

“Oh, Jupe, you’re always so wonderfully cool. I think cat man wanted to enter the hotel and probably do some havoc.”

Jupiter agreed with him. “To do what?”

“Probably another Elba debacle.”

“What do we know about cat man?” Jupiter asked.

Pete suspected that Jupiter would give the answer himself, so he remained silent.

“We can assume,” lectured Jupiter, “that cat man came with the motorcycle I noticed earlier—the one that didn’t drive past you.”

Pete nodded, he hadn’t thought of that at all. “But where is he now?” he asked, frightened. “I didn’t hear a motorbike go away.”

Now it was up to Jupiter to agree with Pete. “Right,” he said, lowering his voice. “I hope he’s not still lurking around here somewhere.”

The First Investigator looked around. The darkness between the trees was impenetrable. Branches cracked in the forest, but that was probably due to the light wind.

Quietly, Jupe continued. “I also noticed his tremendously agile movements.”

Pete hissed: “And above all, that dreadful mask—a gaping mouth and huge fangs! Jupe, if he still around here...”

“It was just a mask, Pete. A tiger or a cheetah or some kind of animal.” Jupiter was silent and thought. Even in the dark, Pete saw him pinching his lower lip—a clear sign that Jupiter was tinkering with some theory.

“Ha!” Pete suddenly called out into the silence. Jupiter twitched. “Jupe, maybe we still have something,” Pete mumbled again with a muted voice. “I got hold of something at the fight earlier!”

“Gee, you scared the hell out of me,” Jupiter remarked.

Pete rummaged around in his pockets. “Where did I put that stupid note, ah, there!” He must have unconsciously put that piece of paper in his jacket pocket. Pete took it out and Jupiter shone the flashlight.

“That’s not possible,” Pete whispered. It was the top of a torn business card. The friends clearly saw the logo—a globe with the words ‘Business World’ around it in a circle.

“Business World,” Jupiter repeated. “Pete, now tell me that you’ve seen this before.”

“That’s exactly the logo on the business card of the person Julio wanted to meet after our conversation at the beach café,” Pete said.

“And Kelly also said something about a blue globe,” Jupe recalled. “She found the logo on a letter in Strasser’s room.”

“This can’t be a coincidence,” Pete said. “Jupe, they’re going after the players massively to entice them away. Big time.”

“I think I have an idea,” Jupe murmured and remained silent.

Pete whispered in a very gracious manner: “And would the First Investigator have the patience to tell his fellow detective, who is a little slower, what that idea is?”

Jupiter looked around again. “I have something to check tomorrow. If my suspicion is confirmed, I will immediately tell you two something that you could have come up with yourself,” he said quietly.

Pete wanted to reply something, when the unmistakable chugging of a Beetle became audible. "Bob's here, finally," he murmured.

"Let's get out of here," Jupe said.

The moment the Beetle stopped, Pete opened the passenger door and squeezed himself into the back seat. Jupe, calmly took his place next to Bob.

"Go!" Pete urged.

"Take it easy. My old Beetle isn't a Ferrari."

Bob stepped on the accelerator and listened in amazement to the report by Jupiter and Pete. Just as Pete was talking about the business card, Bob overtook a motorcycle. When it was in line with the Beetle, the motorcyclist turned his head briefly and looked into the car. Bob flinched. A bright big cat face stared at him. Bob startled and was headed for the ditch.

"Look out!" Jupiter shouted. He pointed to the moving motorcycle. "That's him! Come on, Bob, go after him! I can't see the licence number!"

But as much as Bob stepped on the accelerator, he had no chance against the bike. Already after a hundred metres, they had lost sight of it. So Bob headed back to the salvage yard.

Finally, back in their quiet, safe headquarters, the friends let themselves fall into the armchairs with relief.

Jupiter opened a family bottle of Coke. "Now you tell me, Bob," he said and poured three glasses. Pete had also made himself comfortable and had his legs stretched out.

"Well, guys. I also have something interesting to report. I distracted the guard and saw this light show. At first, I was really scared, until I noticed that it wasn't you, Pete. The security guard wanted to get rid of me and attend to the matter, so he sent me to the hotel. That's where I saw Strasser there and he remembered that I write for the *Los Angeles Times*. Well, he told me some very interesting news."

"Don't make it so exciting," Jupiter interrupted him.

Pete turned his eyes to the ceiling. "Come on, Bob, spit it out."

"So, guys, hold on tight," Bob continued. "Tomorrow at 10 am, a press conference will take place where it will be announced that the coach Jochen Franke is on leave with immediate effect. He's already left the hotel!"

"Wow," Pete said. "I told you so! Serves him right where he hit on Kelly so stupidly."

"What is the reason for his departure?" asked Jupe coolly.

"He's being blamed for the Elba incidents, the spray can and all that," Bob said. "He must have wanted to get Elba out because he knew too much about him or something. Strasser also said that Franke have not completed his 'Pro Licence' for football coaching and he can only be a caretaker coach until someone suitable is hired. Also, he hinted that Franke embezzled money. The manager wanted a quick clean cut. There's too much at stake."

Jupiter and Pete were speechless for a moment. "Now who's coaching?" Pete wanted to know.

"The assistant, until a successor is found. But I guess they've already got a prospect. After that I met Klinger, by the way. He was less talkative and just said: 'No comment'. Elba sat around frustrated with a glass of beer and then disappeared into his room."

"Well, that settles this part of the case," Pete said.

"I don't know," Jupiter replied. "Then how do you explain the cat man?"

"He has nothing to do with Franke. He may have secretly wanted to meet a player to entice him away. Or he was Franke's henchman," Pete surmised. "What's clear is that Franke is behind this. Just think of the spray can in his room. And this strange cat story of Julio."

“That’s right, Pete,” Jupiter said. “At least for this cat story, I still have no explanation. But maybe tomorrow. You know, I’m working on a theory.”

Pete looked at him snappishly. Of course, Bob wanted to know what Jupiter was up to.

“I’ll be looking for Franke tomorrow,” Jupiter said curtly. “Pete, you take care of information about Business World. And Bob, you’d better go to the press conference. I think it’s more complicated than we think.”

Bob got up. “Well, our boss has decided everything again!” He patted Pete on the shoulder.

He screamed. “Ow! That hurts so bad!”

“Bob didn’t know that,” Jupiter said.

11. Franke Reveals

“What kind of mystery are you in now?” Uncle Titus stood in the middle of Jupiter’s room and looked at his nephew frowning.

Jupiter startled. Uncle Titus had torn him out of restless dreams whose pictures were still clearly before his eyes. Shortly before waking up, hideous animal fraternities had followed him through school and prevented him from going to class on time. So Jupiter was grateful to his uncle that he had finally freed himself from this story.

He rubbed his eyes. “What do you mean, Uncle Titus?” he asked and straightened up.

Uncle Titus nodded towards the window. “Well, there’s a car outside our gate. Two guys are sitting in there watching the area. It’s been a while. Two slick, neat guys.”

So Jupiter was awake for good. “I don’t know what this is about! Do you really think they’re waiting for me?”

Uncle Titus looked at him critically. “Dear Jupe, has it ever happened that creepy visitors or strange observers showed up here and not in some way linked to you?”

“Well, Uncle, if you ask me that...”

“I want to warn you anyway, Jupe. I’m not like your aunt Mathilda but I’d like to tell you to take care of yourself. I’ll emphasize that especially after reading the morning paper.” He pulled out a newspaper and held it under Jupe’s nose.

Jupiter grabbed it and immediately saw what Uncle Titus meant. His letter to the editor about Futurio was printed in the newspaper today. However, it was greatly shortened, as Jupiter disappointedly found out.

“Fortunately, the newspaper people didn’t put your full name under it,” Uncle Titus said. “Just ‘J.J. of Rocky Beach’. But that was enough for the cult people to find out where you lived.”

Jupiter had stood up and looked out the window. In fact, across the street in front of the driveway was parked a silver Chevrolet. A young man was sitting behind the wheel and on the passenger seat a second man was meddling with a camera.

“You mean you think those people out there are from Futurio?” Jupe wondered.

Uncle Titus nodded. “All you have to do is put one and one together. After all, I have a little of your talent for deductions in our family genes, too.”

Jupiter moaned. “That too. Actually, we have other things on our minds right now. Uncle Titus, I promise I’ll avoid them.” Uncle Titus nodded. “I hope so. Aunt Mathilda has prepared a delicious breakfast.”

It only took Jupiter a few phone calls until he knew where the dismissed coach was staying. Jupiter had often passed by the small, somewhat run-down hotel several times. It was in the middle of Rocky Beach, but had no beach view and was often the last resort for a hotel room in Rocky Beach.

The two guys were guarding the salvage yard entrance, so Jupiter left the house through the back door, and climbed over the fence to a small side road. He avoided going from the front as the two guys in the Chevy would see him as they were guarding the main entrance to the salvage yard.

Through the side road, he reached the bus stop unnoticed. There he waited for the bus to take him to Franke's hotel.

There was nobody at the hotel's reception. Jupiter bent over the counter and leafed through the guest list. There wasn't even a computer here. There it was—'Franke, Room 21'.

Jupiter went up the stairs and knocked on the door.

Franke's voice sounded muffled: "Come in."

Jupiter entered. Franke was sitting in the only armchair in the small room. He didn't look very happy. The blond hair hung uncombed in his slightly reddened face. The table next to him was empty, except for a six-pack of beer. It was a crushing sight. If Franke was indeed innocent, then he had been hit pretty hard. Within a few hours, the coach of one of the most successful European football teams had become an undesirable person. His good reputation had taken quite a beating.

"Hello, Mr Franke, my name is Jupiter Jones," Jupiter introduced himself.

Franke looked at him sharply. "I don't remember seeing you before," he said in a clear voice. Franke was obviously not as exhausted as Jupiter had first judged him to be.

"No, that's right. Not me, but you know my friends—Bob Andrews, who writes for the *Los Angeles Times*, and Pete Crenshaw, a player of the Rocky Beach Boys, against whom your, uh, former team played a training match."

Franke gave a tortured smile. "Ah, another conspiracy..."

Jupiter listened. "Conspiracy? Yeah, we're friends, but conspiracy?"

Franke distorted his mouth. It was supposed to be the beginning of a smile. "Don't take it so seriously. But what has happened to me in the last few days seems like a conspiracy to me. I'm sure you heard it from your friend at the *Los Angeles Times*.

"First, jerseys were cut up and sprayed on, then out of the blue the blame is put on me and suddenly everyone tells a bad story about me. The evidences are placed on me. And just a few hours later, I'm out of a job. The team has also changed a lot. From one day to the next, players began to turn away from me—except Klinger. It's unbelievable!"

Jupiter nodded. "This really all happened pretty fast." He felt that Franke was basically happy to finally be able to talk to someone about his fate. "Why are you still here in Rocky Beach, Mr Franke?"

Franke got up and cleared the beer cans. "My first reaction was indeed to fly back immediately. But then I thought I couldn't give up so quickly what I had built up at Borussia. I just need to know what kind of story is going on at the club. But I don't know how to figure it out yet."

"Maybe I can help you with that," Jupiter said. "But first, I have two points to make. Is it true you don't have a Pro coaching licence, Mr Franke?"

"Oh, that story. Yeah, it's true, I don't have it yet. I only have an 'A' licence. But there are many more famous football coaches who have coached without the Pro licence. By the way, I was in the process of completing it, and the club management knew about it. Only for the press it was new, and in this situation, it created more stories for them, of course."

"And the allegation of money embezzlement?"

"I don't know. Somehow a strange document appeared in the press yesterday. It is supposed to prove that I would have secretly earned a share of the transfer fee if a player changed clubs. I saw a copy of that document. It was a clumsy fake. But by the time the truth comes to light, the story has long since been bought."

"What player was it about?" Jupiter asked.

“He’s playing here near you here. Fred Zimmermann.”

“Zimmermann!” Jupiter remembered. Zimmermann played for the L.A. Strikers, an American football team that had never made the breakthrough despite expensive purchases. “Didn’t you get another player for it back then in exchange?” Jupiter wanted to know.

“That’s right. I see you know your stuff. We got some money and Strasser, who had played in America for a while.”

“Strasser! How small the world is,” Jupiter said. “Do you think Strasser might have anything to do with this?”

“If you’d asked me two days ago, I’d have strictly said no. But now I think almost anything is possible.” Franke bent over. “Now you’ve asked a lot of questions, Jupiter Jones, hopefully remembering that you wanted to help me.”

Jupiter nodded. Franke had answered very openly and without hesitation. Jupiter believed him. Anyway, he was following the theory that Franke was innocent. He pulled out a business card from The Three Investigators and handed it to the coach.

“We’re not just football fans and journalists, we’re detectives. And I think maybe we can really help you.” Franke studied the card in amazement and Jupiter continued speaking. “If you’re realistic, you don’t have much to lose anyway.”

Franke didn’t say anything, but he seemed interested.

“You know,” Jupiter explained, “it’s actually like football—we can’t guarantee success, but we can promise to try. And a committed attempt can lead to a happy ending.”

Jupiter’s words actually lured a smile to Franke’s lips. “You said that beautifully, Jupiter Jones. It’s just like that, whether in football, detective work, or any other life.”

Jupiter gladly accepted the compliment. He also noted with satisfaction that his ability to adapt to other people had once again helped him a lot.

“We’re already fully deployed,” he said. “We currently have two people in the hotel—Bob as a journalist and Kelly Madigan, a friend, a chambermaid.”

But Franke reacted horrified to Jupiter’s last words.

“Kelly Madigan! That’s that sneaky girl who hid the spray paint can in my room!”

“Slow down, Mr Franke. Not so fast with the inferences. Kelly didn’t frame you! She only found the can there. But consider the possibility that there was a stranger in your room earlier. We believe Kelly was made to find the spray can there to prove your guilt unintentionally.”

“It doesn’t matter anyway.” Franke nodded thoughtfully.

Jupiter pulled out the torn business card they had taken from the cat man yesterday. “Do you know this symbol?”

Franke took the shred of paper in his hand and looked at it in wonder. “What’s that?”

“This is the logo of Business World. Apparently an economic consulting firm. We suspect they have something to do with this. Did you know that Strasser has contacts with Business World?”

“No.” Franke gave Jupiter the piece of paper back. “Maybe it’s an agency that recruits players for other clubs,” he suspected. “Strasser has become an important midfielder for us.”

“We’ve thought of that. Could there be attempts by other clubs to entice players away?”

“It could be, but that wouldn’t be fair play. Under the football regulations, other agents or parties cannot approach a player without the consent of the club.”

“What other reasons can you think of, Mr Franke?”

“Maybe revenge on me... but I don’t know why. I’m sure someone wanted to drive a wedge between the team and me.”

Jupiter nodded, put the note back and turned to the door as if he wanted to leave. The last question should come as a surprise. All of a sudden, he turned around again: "Oh, one more thing, Mr Franke. What was the story behind the sprayed-on cat?"

Franke laughed. "Cat? Mr Detective, that wasn't a cat! That was a jaguar. I'm never supposed to tell anyone, but now it doesn't matter anyway. You know, Julio da Elba has a brother, Alberto. When they were children, they were called the Elba jaguars. They grew up in the jungle, experienced much together."

Jupiter listened spellbound. "So it was a child's game?"

"Yes, but probably a very intense one. The two jaguars on adventure hunt; the jaguars in danger; the jaguars climb from tree to tree; the jaguars on the lookout; the jaguars flee from big game hunters; and so on. They experienced all their children's adventures under the sign of the jaguar."

"How do you know that so well?"

"Julio told me. You have to know that his brother has disappeared by now. He broke off all relationships. Julio suffers greatly."

Jupiter nodded. He wouldn't tell Franke he already knew that part of the story. Now he was sure that Franke was telling the truth. And so far, the former coach's narrative has been completely consistent with that of Elba's.

Jupiter asked further. "And now a jaguar is sprayed on his jersey. Why does that upset Elba so much?"

"It's a weird story. As Alberto grew older and wanted to break away from his little brother, but Julio hung on to him like a leech. Julio loved his brother. One day, as a warning, Alberto cut his clothes off. Julio still wouldn't let him go. Alberto's last message was a black jaguar sprayed on his car together with a big cross on it. It was a strong symbol, at least for Julio. It should mean as much as: 'Your jaguar no longer exists. That's in the past. It was child's play. Leave me alone! Go away!' Julio was close to tears when he told me. He's still very attached to Alberto today."

Jupe nodded. "Then the reappearance of these symbols must have hit him hard. And of course he believed that you were behind it, because you are the only one who knows the meaning of those signs. The strange thing is, how did the intruder know about the jaguar story? Elba had only told you."

"Of course, I don't know for sure," Franke said. "All I know is that he told me here in Rocky Beach. We talked about the fact that many Brazilians of the football league return too late from the winter break because they spend too much time in Brazil on vacation. That's how he spoke of his friends and his family."

"We had a good and trusting relationship until recently, Julio and I. I was his contact person here at the club. But why would he lie? Julio's not the type. If he claims that of all the people at Borussia, he only told me the story of his brother, then I believe that that is certainly true."

Jupiter thought for a moment. "Where did you talk to Julio about this, Mr Franke?"

"It was in my room at the Sports Hotel. And there was absolutely no one else around if that's what you're getting at. I can't explain it."

"Thank you, Mr Franke. You've helped us a lot. I hope we can return the favour. We'll proceed with your case, won't we?"

Franke nodded to him. "Sure. What do you take for a fee?"

"Nothing," Jupiter said and shook Franke's hand to say goodbye.

As the door to Franke's room closed behind him, Jupiter believed that they've achieved a big step forward in the case. He walked down the stairs and saw the receptionist, who had

returned to his place and was reading a newspaper.

12. The Jaguar Attacks

Jupiter took the bus back. Dark clouds gathered in the sky and the wind came up. When he walked into the side road next to the house, he saw the silver-grey Chevrolet with the two men coming.

Jupiter quickly ducked behind a parked car and waited until the car had passed. So his guards had given up the post. Nevertheless, he climbed over the fence and entered the house through the back door.

It was not an exaggerated measure when Jupiter pushed the curtains of his room a little aside and looked outside. Instead of the silver-grey Chevrolet, there was now a blue BMW in front of the gate, in which two men were waiting.

So it was only the changing of the guards. Jupiter went to the phone and dialled Pete's number.

"It's me, Jupe."

"Hi, Jupe. Come on, tell me! Were you with Franke? And are you finally letting out your ultra-secret theory?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. I see much clearer now, Pete. Let's all meet as soon as possible at Headquarters. But hurry up, there'll be a downpour."

"The sun is still shining here, I'm coming by bicycle," Pete said.

"Whatever you say. Oh, and one more thing—use Red Gate Rover. The salvage yard's entrance is under surveillance."

"Surveillance?"

"Probably by Futurio. Because of my letter in the papers," Jupe surmised. "We don't want them to bother us as long as they're just standing around down there."

"Well, I don't know!" Pete sounded scared.

Jupiter didn't respond. "I'll let Bob know. See you in a while."

"Okay. By the way, I haven't found out anything about Business World yet," Pete said. "But I called Bob's father. He has a new colleague in the Business Department and he wants to talk to him about it today."

"Well done, Pete! The newspaper people probably know the most. See you soon!"

Jupiter hung up and then dialled Bob's number, but it went into the answering machine. So Bob wasn't back from the press conference yet, so Jupiter left a message. He left the house in a hurry and sneaked into the salvage yard through a side entrance and into the trailer. The wind had come in strong again. The first raindrops swept towards him.

Jupe got into Headquarters and not a moment too soon, the phone rang. It was Mrs Seven, his history teacher.

"Have a good day, Jupiter. I'm sorry to call you so unexpectedly during the holidays."

"No problem, Mrs Seven," Jupiter said.

"I have received a strange call that I would like to inform you immediately," Mrs Seven said. "It was an anonymous caller a few minutes ago. He said you were blackmailing your classmates at school. They're supposed to give you money, so that you would not reveal them copying their assignments and things like that."

"But, Mrs Seven, you know too well that..."

“... you’re a straight, honest detective,” the teacher completed the sentence she started. “Of course. I don’t believe a word the caller says. I just wanted to let you know. Someone’s trying to blackmail you.”

Jupiter replied in a flash. “Mrs Seven, I think I know what’s behind this. Read the letter to the editor in today’s *Los Angeles Times*. I published a letter there about a cult. I guess I’ll be their target now.”

“That may well be, Jupiter. All the more reason for you to take care of yourself. You know you can always turn to me for help.”

“Thank you, Mrs Seven. Thank you very much.”

Jupiter hung up. What worried him was not so much those underhand, anonymous accusations compared to the fact that his opponents were apparently well-informed about him. They already knew his teacher. The thing seemed to take on a dimension that threatened to divert much of his focus on the football case.

Meanwhile the rain pelted heavily against the window pane. Jupiter heard a distant thunder. At that moment, Pete came in. He looked like he came from a car wash. The wet hair stuck to his head and the jacket was completely soaked.

“The weather has totally got me! It’s almost dark night out here.” Pete slipped into the trailer and threw his wet clothes over a chair. Then he went to look through the ‘See-All’ periscope that they had installed in the trailer. It was created with a combination of stove pipes and mirrors that protruded out from the roof so that they could look around the entire salvage yard without being seen, just like in a submarine.

“Do you mean the two neat guys in the blue BMW?” he asked.

“Yes. That’s already the second shift. Before, there were two guys in a Chevy.” Jupiter said and also told Pete about Mrs Seven’s call.

Pete was visibly upset. “Jupe, if they create any trouble, we’ll skip the football case. We’ll help you. Together we can handle them!”

The First Investigator reacted calmly as usual. “Thank you, Pete. But let’s wait and see.”

Then Bob rushed in from the rain. He took off his raincoat and told us that he had arrived at home shortly after Jupiter’s call and had come immediately. There was not much more to report from the press conference than what they had already known. The German journalists were in a great state of excitement. A new coach had also been announced, although no name was mentioned yet. It was clear that he should take over the team while they were still in Rocky Beach.

“Obviously, the press is quickly interested in new developments,” Jupiter concluded.

Pete drove his hand through his wet hair. “Jupe, now it’s your turn. What’s with Franke?”

“Bad,” Jupiter said and briefly reported on the conversation. “I think he was honest and even very fair to Julio da Elba. I think he’s been set up.”

Pete continued to react sceptically. “Okay, the thing with the spray can in his room, it might have been planted. But what about the jaguar story? Only he could know about it. Do you have an answer for that?”

“Yes, I do. It’s so simple, I’m surprised you haven’t figured it out yet.”

Pete and Bob looked at each other questioningly. There was a tremendous thunderclap outside. The rain whipped against the outside wall.

“What we know is that the only time Elba told Franke about the jaguar story was when they were in Franke’s room at the Sports Hotel,” Jupe said. “It was clear at that time, nobody else was there. Somehow, the cat that was sprayed on Elba’s shirt was a jaguar, and the ‘cat man’ that we encountered was actually the ‘jaguar man’. So I suspect that there is someone else who knows about the jaguar story. And who do you think this other person is?”

Bob hit his forehead with his hand. “Sure thing! I can’t believe I didn’t think of that sooner. Jupe! It had to be Alberto, Julio’s brother. Logically, he always knew. The jaguar story was about Julio and Alberto!”

Jupiter grinned satisfied. “That’s the way it is with the jaguar story. And that was exactly my theory. There probably had to be people who knew the story from the past. In addition, the night intruder that appeared with a jaguar mask. And just think about his feline movements. I immediately suspected a connection to the sprayed motif. When Franke explained the meaning of the jaguar symbol to me, it was clear to me—Julio’s brother must be here! And he’s the jaguar from last night. I’m telling you—that was Alberto!”

Pete nodded. “Bravo, Jupe. Sounds very plausible.”

At that moment, there was another deafening thunderclap.

“The thunderstorm must be right on top of us now,” Jupiter said. “But wasn’t there a clattering sound at the same time as the thunder? It sounded as if lightning had struck some junk.”

Bob had also noticed something like this. He jumped up and went to the window. When he stood directly in front of the glass pane, he screamed in horror. For about a second or two, he stared face to face into the lightning-lit mask of a jaguar. Then the mask was gone again.

Pete and Jupiter had also jumped up. They were shocked and listened to the strange noises. They came from the roof. Thumping steps or jumps. Dull blows. Tin parts clattered. In between screams. It had to be a whole bunch of people. Bob had sunk into the armchair. Silently, he followed the creepy scene. Someone was trying to get to them. They were trapped. Pete and Jupiter were also frozen.

“That’s the horror out there,” Pete finally called out. At that moment, the lower part of the periscope trembled. Apparently it’s been hit hard. Pete hurried over to look into ‘See-All’.

“Damn, I can’t see a thing,” Pete said. “Let’s just get out of here.”

“Come on! Let’s catch the Jag!” Jupe shouted.

13. Dirty Hands

In a hurry, Pete grabbed an old baseball bat, Bob picked up a wooden bar, as Jupiter was at the door, ready to open it.

The Three Investigators jumped out from the trailer with a scream that was clearly audible even in the thunderstorm. Rain streaked with hail whipped towards them. The three detectives needed a moment to orient themselves.

They looked up at the roof of the trailer and surprisingly saw three men. The man with the jaguar mask was nearer to them. At the other end of the roof stood two other unpleasant acquaintances. They were the snooty guards from the blue BMW. With horror Pete noticed that one of them was holding the upper part of their periscope in his hand, which he had apparently broken off earlier. This has gone too far. Pete raised his baseball bat.

“Up,” he shouted in a mood to attack. He had even forgotten his aching shoulder for a moment. Bob and Jupiter also made progress. But the jaguar was the first to take to its heels. Skilfully he swung himself from the roof of the trailer over the wall to the street and disappeared from the field of vision of the three detectives.

The two BMW guys looked at the first man briefly, then turned to the three boys and then started the retreat over the wall. It didn’t look nearly as elegant, but there was nothing more to see of them. Pete was the first to take control of the situation and ran towards the entrance gate to pursue the men. Jupiter and Bob ran after him. But when the three detectives reached outside the salvage yard, the street was already empty. No sign of a blue BMW.

“That was a crystal-clear attack on our headquarters,” Pete shouted and rubbed his shoulder. “But what does the jaguar have to do with the men from Futurio?”

Jupiter urged the friends back to the trailer. How dangerous the situation had been was now slowly becoming clear to him.

Bob was pale, too. “We’ve been acting pretty stupid,” he said to Jupiter.

He nodded. “Pretty risky, especially since we were down here and they were on the roof.”

“But we did drive them away,” Pete shouted. “Just like in football, sometimes even the little ones win!” He was still in a winning mood.

“I’m sure it is a warning,” Jupiter thought. “We’re going too far into the case now.”

“So there is a connection between the jaguar and Futurio,” Bob said.

Jupiter agreed with him. “Sure. Remember what Julio told you, Pete. His brother Alberto met new friends at that time and became increasingly detached. It sounds like he’s into the cult.”

“These people almost always break off contact with their family and friends,” Bob said. “The cult wants this.”

Jupiter agreed with him. “Yes, the more isolated the new members are, the stronger their influence will be. And also the dependence on the new friends grows. The old acquaintances become enemies.”

“The whole story of Alberto’s disappearance was a few years ago,” Pete said. “Alberto could be a senior member at Futurio by now.”

“And he could lead a kind of command troop that wants something from the footballers,” Bob continued. “And we’re in his way. We should ask Julio if it was the Futurio organization his brother joined at the time.”

“And somehow Business World is involved,” Jupiter thought. “Let’s call your father again, Bob.”

Bob picked up the phone. Fortunately it had survived the thunderstorm in one piece. But Bob’s father didn’t have any exciting news to report.

“Business World is a normal, reputable recruitment company,” Bob summed up his father’s information. “Oliver Crawford, my father’s colleague, knows nothing conspicuous, especially nothing about a connection to Futurio. And he probably knows his stuff pretty well.”

Jupiter pulled his eyebrows together. “Hmm. I wouldn’t be too sure about that.” He didn’t like the information.

A car drove up in the yard. Pete stood up and looked through the window. It was Kelly’s mum’s car. Kelly spun out, followed by a girl with curly brown hair. The rain had almost stopped in the meantime. Kelly and the other girl jumped over some bigger puddles. Then they entered the trailer and were fascinated by the puddles of water there.

“Did it rain in here?” Kelly asked, playing naive.

“Traces of our spring-cleaning,” Jupiter said dryly. “We wanted to leave the rest to room service.”

Kelly laughed. “Well, we got there just in time. This is Doria, my colleague from the Sports Hotel.”

Doria nodded to say hello. “So you’re The Three Investigators!”

“Yes,” said Jupiter. “So Kelly told you...”

“... that you’re detectives, yes. We get along fine, Kelly and I. You must be Jupiter? I’ve seen Bob at the hotel.” With hardly any hidden curiosity, she then examined Pete. “Then you’re Pete, Kelly’s friend?”

Pete nodded and noticed that Jupiter was struggling to suppress his anger. He hated it when other people were unnecessarily involved in their detective work.

There was a short skirmish between Pete and Doria, but Jupiter soon interrupted it harshly. “Do you have any other questions, Doria?”

“Huh? Do you want us to leave?” Kelly interfered.

“I’m sorry, we detectives still have to sort out some facts,” Jupiter replied a little friendlier.

“Then I don’t want to disturb you any further,” Doria said calmly and turned to the door. “I have to go to work at the hotel soon anyway.”

Kelly followed her without comment. Bob and Pete looked helplessly after the two girls.

“You can be pretty rough sometimes,” Bob said to Jupiter when they were alone again.

Jupiter didn’t go into it and flipped through the script board set up at Headquarters until he came to a free page.

“We’re doing an inventory,” he said. “There are some inconsistencies. I want to write everything down once.” Jupiter took a big felt-tip pen. “One, Mr Toll. We suspected him. But if he actually belongs to Business World, why does Alberto have to break into the hotel at night if he is with them? Or Toll has nothing to do with this.” Jupiter wrote down the point.

“Second, Alberto,” Pete said. “If he’s part of Futurio, then the organization probably has something to do with Business World. That’s what the business card suggests. Then why does the colleague of Bob’s father say there is no connection?”

Jupiter nodded and noted the point. “Maybe Business World doesn’t even know he’s in the cult,” he thought. Then he nodded to Bob encouragingly.

Next, Bob said: “Third, Business World. What do they want? Poach players? Do they work for the competition and want to weaken the club?”

“Maybe there is no connection between Business World and Futurio,” Pete thought. “And maybe Alberto didn’t even step in there.”

“That would be another answer to point two,” Jupiter said. “But not on point one. And besides, why does Alberto then attack our trailer together with the Futurio people?”

Bob shrugged his shoulders. “Business World is probably really a normal company,” he said. “And how Alberto got their card is completely coincidental. He could have found it. Then Franke and the jaguar story about Julio has nothing to do with it. Maybe somebody just wants revenge on the coach.”

Jupiter was eager to write it down. “Yes, Franke,” he murmured. “They wanted to get rid of the coach. But who’s behind it? In the end, perhaps even the club manager himself?”

Pete looked outside. The sun was already shining again. “We can get the broken periscope from the roof now,” he said. “The attackers did a pretty good job of damaging it.”

Jupiter turned the page. “Oh yes, and finally, our guards,” he said and wrote down: “Why was I under surveillance when the letter to the editor was just published? Also, it only had my initials under it.”

The three detectives thought back and forth for a while. But the contradictions could not be resolved. “Anyway, we need to watch the security video recordings,” Jupiter said. “You can help us out. Should we get our hands dirty and enter secretly, or should we ask Mr Toll for his help?” Jupiter looked at both of them.

“No, not at all!” Bob’s answer came so suddenly that Jupiter and Pete looked at their friend in alarm.

“Mr Toll’s in on it,” Bob shouted. “At least in sprayed shirt. I think I now know how the black stains got on my hand when I visited the changing room!”

“Come on, let’s hear it!” Pete urged his friend. “Why are you suddenly so sure that Toll has his fingers in this?”

Bob smiled. “Jupe just said it himself—‘Get our hands dirty’. Great, and I shook hands in the corridor to the changing rooms. He must have had fresh black paint on his hand! And that must have happened while spraying the shirt! Maybe he heard me and it scared him. In any case, this explains the position of the black smudge on my right hand. The colour must have been on the fingers of his right hand.”

“This is indeed a strong suspicion,” said Jupiter. “If that’s the case, maybe two independent stories are really happening here. The sprayed jaguar of Mr Toll and the jaguar story about Alberto. We really need to find out more about Alberto’s past. The best thing is to ask Julio again. And at the same time, Pete can go into the security office to look for the videos.”

Jupiter picked up the phone and tried to call Franke. Perhaps the former coach could persuade the only player behind him—Klinger—to come to him in a car. Pete could get into the boot, and go unseen into the hotel premises.

Pete wasn’t enthusiastic about the idea. “Can’t you think of anything else, Jupe? Anything but hiding in a car boot! Is there other more pleasant way to get in?”

Jupiter could not be dissuaded from his plan. “You don’t have to get into the boot for the whole journey. Just get in before it reaches the entrance. Then it is only a short distance to the building.”

Pete gave in. “All right, okay.”

“We also go to the hotel in my Beetle,” Bob added. “To speak to Julio and watch out for you.”

“If we take the car, our Futurio guards will follow,” Jupiter said. “We’d better ride our bikes!”

“But they’re even more on our heels!” Pete exclaimed.

“Not if we start off at the side road next to my house,” Jupiter grinned. “Just don’t let them see us.”

Bob thought the idea was excellent. “We can also ride up the small forest path to the hotel!”

“I didn’t know you were so athletic,” Pete commented enviously. He got up. “I’ll see if our friends are even back yet.”

Pete disappeared into the yard. A short time later he reappeared. “Two new guys, this time with a red Chevy. They must have a whole fleet.”

“Well, let’s go,” Jupiter said, switched on the loudspeaker and dialled Franke’s number.

Franke picked up after the second ring. He was obviously delighted to hear from Jupiter.

“Have you found anything yet?” he wanted to know.

Jupiter affirmed and told of him their suspicions of Mr Toll and Alberto.

Franke was surprised. “Now that you’re saying it, I remember Mr Toll pushing us very hard to get to his hotel. He gave us a really good price. But I can’t imagine what he’s doing with these things. I don’t see any motive.”

“It’s just a suspicion so far, Mr Franke. We hope to find the proof with your help. Can you imagine that your club manager is working with Toll to get rid of you as a coach?”

“No, I’d be very surprised. It was more like he was having a really hard time kicking me out. But he’s an insecure guy. The apparent evidence against me was too strong. You must understand, until recently, the club was still an inconspicuous small club, and unprofessionally led. And now the ordinary people of the past suddenly have to deal with the big business.”

“And Klinger, can you count on him?”

“Absolutely. He’s the only one who still stands by me. I just got off the phone with him earlier. He called me because surprisingly, the team is supposed to leave the hotel tomorrow. The new coach wants the team to be calm again. There’s a meeting about it this afternoon.”

Jupiter exchanged a meaningful look with his friends. “So the new coach is already here? And he wants to leave with everyone tomorrow? Then it’s really urgent.” He explained their plan to Franke, who immediately agreed.

“But make sure you don’t tell anyone when you call Klinger,” Jupiter warned. “You never know who’s listening. And if Toll’s really behind this, he shouldn’t know we’re onto him.”

“Okay,” said Franke. He said he’d call back in half an hour.

There was enough time for the three detectives to pursue another question on the Internet—Fred Zimmermann’s move to the L.A. Strikers. Jupiter turned on the computer.

Under Zimmermann and football, there were several entries—mostly newspaper articles. The articles confirmed Franke’s statements. The Strikers had set themselves high goals and therefore bought some talented players from Europe and South America. Also the coach was changed. Players who did not fit into the tactics of the new coach Cortes were sold, according to the article. So did Strasser, and Fred Zimmermann replaced him as their new midfield star.

“Fred didn’t make it,” Pete remembered.

“In fact, the whole team failed. The new players did not harmonize. Today, the club is no longer competitive. We played against them in a preparation tournament a year and a half

ago, but then we were eliminated.” Pete grinned. “We weren’t as good then as we are now.”

“I remember,” Jupiter said. “By that time, however, this Cortes had already left the team. Didn’t he go to Argentina?”

“I think that’s how it was,” Pete said. “Is there anything about money transfer problems?”

“No.” Jupiter said. He also searched for clues in the other articles.

The phone rang and Jupiter picked it up. It was Franke who said that Pete could be picked up in half an hour at Franke’s hotel. Jupiter passed the information on to Pete.

Pete got up immediately and whispered to Jupiter that he wanted to know something from Franke.

“One more question. I’m sure you talked to Klinger about whom the new coach is, didn’t you?” Jupiter asked.

On Jupiter’s facial expression, Pete and Bob saw that the answer was surprising.

14. Entering the Security Office

Far behind him, Bob heard the First Investigator wheezing. The bike ride upwards through the wooded area caused him trouble. At a small meadow, Bob stopped and waited for his friend.

"It was a stupid idea to go to the Sports Hotel by bicycle," Jupe was told when he came to a stop next to Bob.

"It was your idea, Jupe, remember?" Bob remembered with a grin. "And it was a good idea. At least the Futurio guys are not on our tails."

Jupiter smiled and sat down on a boulder. "That's right. And if they were to follow us, they need an all-terrain vehicle with all-wheel drive. But unfortunately, it was just a boring Chevy..."

Jupiter leaned back. It was sunny, but the wind cooled pleasantly. "I think about it all the time," he murmured after a while, while his hand moved unerringly towards his lower lip.

"Because of Cortes?" Bob remarked. "It's a strange coincidence that the former coach of L.A. Strikers has now become the new coach of FC Borussia."

"Very strange indeed. I can't get all of this together. On the contrary, our clues seem to get more and more. In fact, we're getting clues about clues. And again and again the same names appear. It's like we're starting to have way too much information. The case is over-complex, so to speak."

"A beautiful Jupiter word, Jupe." Bob looked at the path ahead of them. "Hopefully Pete's all right. He should be at the hotel by now. Come on, Jupe, let's go."

But Jupiter remained seated. "There's a second problem."

"What is it?"

"The Futurio raid on Headquarters. Something about it seems strange to me."

Bob nodded. "I was just thinking about it, too. Actually, they should have left a message. Some warning to stay out of the case or something."

Jupiter agreed with him. "But there's something else wrong with the attack. I just can't figure it out. There seems to be something else in between."

Bob changed the subject. "Then let's focus on Pete now. He's really very brave. Nevertheless, we should not leave him alone too long."

"That's right, Bob." Jupiter stood up and swung onto his bike with new energy.

Klinger parked the car backwards in front of the window of his room on the ground floor. He left the boot lid opened a gap and went into the hotel. Two minutes later, his room window opened. Klinger's head showed up.

The air seemed clear. "Okay," he hissed quietly. The boot swung up. Pete climbed out and squeezed out gently. From the corner of his eye, he could see that a person had stepped out of the hotel at some distance. Pete had quickly overcome the short distance to the window and swung himself over the windowsill into Klinger's room. He hoped no one had been seen him. Klinger then left the room.

Pete opened the door to the corridor a little way. He wasn't sure he'd stand out here at all. But he didn't want to risk anything and maybe even run into the arms of the new prime

suspect, Mr Toll. Only when he had found evidence in the security office would he turn to Mr Burt, the hotel manager and explain to him what his marketing manager was up to. Burt probably didn't know anything about all this.

The corridor was empty and Pete stepped out of the room. But he only managed to go a few metres when he heard footsteps. He quickly reached for the nearest door handle. He was lucky, the door opened. Pete slid into the room and quietly closed the door behind him.

"Pete!"

Pete jumped up. Doria stood barely two arms away from him and breathed audibly. She held her head down slightly, so that her brown curls almost covered her face.

Pete looked at her. "What are you doing here?" he asked.

"In a laundry room? I work here!" Doria said and paused. "Well, it was actually like this... I wanted to spy around a bit. I just let myself get infected by your detective work. You know, I used to read a lot of detective stories as a kid."

"Who were you on to?"

"Cortes—the new coach. I brought him drink to his room earlier and discovered a letter which I wanted to have a closer look at now. He's wearing a symbol I've seen before somewhere else. And just as I was on my way to his room, I heard footsteps." She laughed. "So I slipped in here—the laundry room. And those were your footsteps. But now tell me, great detective—have you successfully discussed your ideas?"

Pete could understand Doria's slightly provocative undertone. Jupiter had annoyed her quite clearly.

"I'm sorry about that earlier!" Pete put on a charming smile. "I didn't find it very nice of Jupiter either. But you have to understand him. When we're on a case, he's got no other purpose." He smiled. "And no eyes for girls. But often Jupiter has brought us decisively forward."

"It's all right, Pete." Doria stroked a strand of hair behind her ear. "But tell me, are you here alone? You haven't even said what you're doing here yet?"

Pete explained his plan to Doria in broad outline.

She nodded. "If you want to get into the security office unseen, I'll be happy to help you. And you're lucky. The room should be empty right now. Mr Burt rarely goes in there. Security is Mr Toll's job. And he just drove away, but you never know when he'll be back."

Doria checked to see if the hallway was clear. Then she led Pete in the direction of the cellar. They came through the kitchen, where an assistant chef was preparing dinner.

"Hi, Jack," Doria greeted him. "This is Pete, a friend of mine, who wants to do an internship here. Do you have anything nice to eat?"

Grinning, Jack pushed a basket of strawberries over and Doria took some.

"Thanks!" She put a strawberry in Pete's mouth. "A little food for the adventures ahead," she said quietly.

Finally they reached the cellar entrance. Doria wanted to turn on the light, but Pete held her back. "Leave it off! There's a camera in front of the door whose image may be transmitted to the doorman or the entrance security booth."

"Do you know the combination of the key lock?" Doria asked.

"I hope so. Otherwise, you'll probably hear the alarm in a moment..."

"Well then. Good luck!"

Pete disappeared into the dark. On the walls he felt his way down the stairs. He had the plan drawn up by Kelly painted right in his head. Now he should go around the corner and there was the steel sliding door. The camera had to be across the corridor.

“Hopefully nobody will come into the cellar now and turn on the light,” he muttered. At least Doria kept the chef away. Pete listened muffled to how they cheerfully flutter around together.

Pete pulled a thick tape out of his jacket pocket. With the pocket knife he cut off several short strips. Then he began to cover the lens of the camera with several layers of tape. Finally, he reached for his flashlight and shone up. Relieved, he breathed a sigh of relief. This camera now certainly only transmitted the blackness.

Pete took Kelly’s note with the key combination from his jacket pocket and turned to the steel door again. The beam of his flashlight quickly found the keypad. Amazed, he saw that it consisted not of numbers but of symbols. On the top left a dollar sign, then a scale, a television screen, a ball, a kind of sheriff’s star, a lyre...

But most astonished Pete the symbol of the large key in the centre of the keypad. He recognized it as the blue globe logo of Business World.

Pete had several thoughts running through his mind, all of which came down to one decisive point—this hotel had to belong to Business World! A gimmick that was treacherous, at least for a detective on a hot trail. But then the other symbols certainly also had a meaning. Of course, the scales meant justice. Dollar maybe finances or banks? Owl could stand for knowledge, science. Star? Star for Sheriff? Security? Police? Ball of course for sports. And Business World stood in the middle, as a central symbol that connects everything.

Pete’s knees went soft. What kind of story were they on to? Or was there no story at all? In any case, he needed to get into the security office for the answers. Trembling, Pete pressed the keys as stated on Kelly’s note—top centre, bottom right, bottom centre, top left. The Business World logo lit up briefly. The sliding door slid to the side with a soft whirring sound.

15. The Face of the Jaguar

Pete stepped inside. Almost silently, the door closed behind him. He was standing in an elongated room that was only dimly lit. The bluish shining logo of Business World, which was embedded in the wall on the opposite side, caught his eye all the more. On the right side wall, three screens flickered above a large control panel.

On one, Pete recognized the entrance security booth. The second screen transmitted a perspective from the reception counter of the hotel. On the third, Pete discovered a view along the fence. The fourth and fifth screens were dark, one of which may have belonged to camera that Pete taped up.

Pete looked around. On the left-hand side, there were some larger shelves which were equipped with video cassettes. Pete went and took a closer look at the videos. He couldn't figure out the labels stuck on it. He turned around again. He had to stay calm, work fast, but also focussed.

Pete ran over to the screens. Below them, various knobs were mounted on a board. Pete chose one of the dark screens and took a close look at the instruments. Then he pressed the red button and let out a satisfied sigh. The screen lit up. At first Pete didn't want to believe what he saw. The TV screen showed the inside of one of the guest rooms! So there were hidden cameras inside the rooms! On the control panel, there was a keyboard alongside the hotel room layout chart. Pete suspected that the keyboard is used to enter the room number so looked at the plan and keyed in a room number. It was incredible. There really was a camera in every room. He keyed in a few more rooms but there were no one in any of them at the time. All the players might be in the dining room.

Now it was suddenly clear why Julio's jaguar story could be heard by other person. When Franke and Elba spoke in Franke's room, someone was at the security office listening to the conversation and recorded it.

Pete keyed in '17'. Kelly had told him that this was Julio's room. The room appeared on the screen. It was almost completely visible from the camera perspective. Pete had to grin involuntarily. According to Kelly's cleanliness assessment, Julio clearly belonged to the rather untidy people.

While Pete was looking at the clothes lying around, he suddenly noticed a slight change in the light. Someone had to be in Julio's room, probably by the window. That's when the shadow came into the picture. Pete's gaze became rigid. It was the jaguar man.

Unconsciously, Pete grabbed his shoulder. He saw the jaguar mask appear right in front of the camera. The man put the mask in place. Then he posed in front of the camera, his arms resting on his hips, turning slowly, his face always facing Pete. Could Alberto see him, too? Pete got scared. But then he realized that the camera had to be behind a mirror. With a jerk the jaguar took off his mask, drove through his hair and grinned into the picture. Alberto's resemblance to Julio was frap-pant, although Alberto's face looked somewhat older and narrower. Alberto turned around, went to the bed and put the mask on Julio's pillow.

Pete looked at the room layout. He located the camera that showed the corridor where Julio's room was located, and made it visible on the monitor. He was now so fascinated by his discovery that he no longer paid attention to time. Doria just passed by. When she had

disappeared, Julio's room door opened and Alberto sneaked out. Pete followed him on his way through the hotel by switching to the respective cameras. From time to time, Alberto disappeared into blind areas, but Pete found him again and again.

What was his goal? It was obvious that Alberto didn't want to be discovered. He hid several times. Now he was moving toward the basement entrance. Suddenly Pete was anxious. Alberto could be heading to the security office! Trembling Pete switched to the camera in the basement. But the picture remained black. Then he remembered that he blocked out that camera.

He quickly turned off the monitor. Where was he gonna hide? It was an unforgivable mistake for not immediately looking for an escape route. Pete heard a noise at the door. He chose the back shelf. Not a second too soon, because that's when the door slid open. Alberto came into the room.

For a moment, he looked around searching. Pete stood motionless behind the shelf, which did not completely hide him. He was just hoping that he won't be discovered! Then he heard the door close.

Alberto stepped towards the blue globe logo of Business World. Pete breathed deeply and bent slightly forward. He saw Alberto pressing on two points embedded in the globe that Pete had thought were patterns. The logo swung up. A small shelf recessed into the wall came to light, and some video cassettes were placed inside. Alberto checked the labels and then decided on one of the cassettes. Then he let the logo snap back into its holder.

Just as Alberto was about to insert the cassette into a player, Pete heard a slight scratching in the corridor. Alberto had apparently also noticed it, because he was switching to display the corridor view on the monitor. But the screen remained black.

Pete knew why.

Then the door slid open as Alberto inconspicuously dropped the video cassette into the waste basket.

Mr Toll came in, accompanied by two men who immediately pointed their guns at Alberto.

"Well, we finally caught you, you traitor," Toll said in his sharp voice. "I'm sorry, my friend, but somebody saw you go through the window."

Pete was eagerly hoping that the men would leave the room as soon as possible. He did not feel particularly safe in his hiding place. However, one of Toll's two companions ran to the control panel to examine it.

"Come," Toll said. "He couldn't have done much harm yet. Let's get the traitor out of here!" The man turned to the exit and followed the others out. Gently the sliding door closed behind them.

They won't be gone long, Pete thought. The situation was extremely confusing. The Second Investigator was surprised at Toll taking Alberto away.

He quickly left his hiding place and fished the video cassette out of the waste basket. The answers had to be there.

Pete inserted the video cassette into a player and pressed the 'Play' button. The picture appeared on one of the TV monitors. It showed a bare-looking room, apparently a conference room. There was a table in the centre. Two people entered the scene.

Pete recognized them immediately—Mr Toll and Mr Burt. They sat down at the table and spoke quietly. Pete couldn't hear the conversation. Then another person showed up—Alberto. After a brief greeting, Alberto was asked to take a seat opposite Toll and Burt.

Toll started the conversation. "Alberto, we're glad you came to help us at the Sports Division. We know you've achieved a lot in the Business Division. But basically we are all

working for our common parent company—no matter which division. After all, we all have the common, the great goal to cleanse the earth of evil forces. And to occupy the centres of power in all important areas—the nerve centres of politics and culture, the judiciary and the economy, and even sport. We put all of this in the right hands, in clean hands—namely ours—for the good of the future, in the name of Futurio.”

Pete listened in horror. Now he suddenly realized the meaning of the symbols on the keypad next to the door. Each symbol stood for one of these so-called divisions. Each division should be in power in its area. And all divisions were united in Business World, the operational arm of Futurio!

Nervously, Pete clawed his hands together. The matter was much larger than he and his friends had assumed.

“An important operational field,” Burt explained on the video, “is our new Sports Hotel. Here we come into contact with many successful athletes and sports organizations.”

“Yes,” added Toll. “In the past, we tried to build out own clubs, for example, the L.A. Strikers. We have now changed the concept because we had little success with it. Now we want to take over promising clubs directly. First in football, because it’s the most popular. We need a top European club. Imagine the possibilities that this presents for us. We will be present on television, in newspapers, and in media. The more stable the situation becomes for us, the more we will go public. We will reach millions of people with our jersey advertising for Futurio and use it for our message. We will have more people in Europe than ever before, and we are part of a booming business with millions!”

Alberto listened all the time and slid restlessly back and forth on his chair. He belonged to Futurio—that was now clear—but apparently the introductory talks got on his nerves. He waited impatiently for the point, which is why the two had called him to them.

“In the next few days we will have a top club as our guest,” Mr Toll continued. “FC Borussia from Germany will set up its winter training camp here!” Toll paused.

Alberto stirred. “FC Borussia? My brother’s playing for them!”

“That’s exactly why we asked you here,” Toll replied with a cool smile. “Your brother Julio. You haven’t seen him in years.”

Alberto crossed his arms. “And what am I supposed to do?”

“You know he’s very attached to you. It was hard enough to shake him off when you first joined us. Now the time has come to approach him. Open your arms. Receive him. Bring him into our wonderful community.” Toll’s voice got sharper again. “And if he’s not playing, at least get him to help us remove the coach of Borussia!”

16. Foul Game

“I’m supposed to suddenly take care of my brother,” Albert shouted in horror. “Futurio has demanded that I never see him again! That was my greatest sacrifice to you! And now I should just go to him, wish him a good day and involve him in your lousy business?”

“Watch your mouth!” Toll replied sharply. “It’s still your business, too, my friend. For the good of mankind. Don’t forget that!”

“I’ve been wondering for a long time if this is all right with what we’re doing.”

“We know that, my friend. Better than you think. We’ve spoken to your Futurio confessor.”

Alberto jumped up, but Toll kept talking. “Helping us here is your last chance. Otherwise, we’ll have to admit you to the Purity Centre—to get you back on the clean path. You know what that means!”

Alberto got angry. Pete saw this despite the unfavourable camera perspective.

“I suppose you’ve got backup from the top...” Alberto shrugged his shoulders and said nothing, but breathed deeply. “So, what exactly is my brother supposed to do? Dump the coach?”

“But, these are really not our methods!” Toll remarked. “A little blackening, a few little lies, this and that—we have enough material and ideas. Julio plays such an important role in the team and in the media that it would go off like a bomb.” Toll’s voice got sweet. “Julio is so pure, so honest, so innocent... He would believe anything!”

Burt interfered. “And he has the support of the team. Strasser, the midfielder, is one of us. When the coach is removed, we’ll replace him with Cortes—you’ve heard of him—our top psycho-coach. If he succeeds with his new training concepts, the kids in Europe will run after us like their stupid pop stars.”

Pete felt that Toll and Burt—completely fascinated by their own thoughts—were clearly underestimating Alberto’s principles. He was fuming inside. “What if my brother doesn’t cooperate?”

“Alberto...,” the voice of Toll sounded condescendingly friendly, “... of course we won’t be able to put him in our Purity Centre. But sometimes it’s supposed to—so purely coincidentally—there’ll be little accidents—so he can’t play football anymore. A few months, a year, a lifetime...”

“You pigs!” Alberto yelled. “I’m not gonna do this!” He jumped out of the picture. “Why don’t you do your own dirty work?” Alberto left the room in a hurry.

Burt and Toll had a quick look at each other.

“Damn it, he’s leaving,” Toll shouted and also set himself in motion. Burt followed him.

Afterwards the picture stood still some seconds, then the recording broke off. The recording ended.

Shocked, Pete stared at the dark screen. Now everything was clear to him. Alberto was on the run from the members of the cult of which he himself was a member. But apparently he wanted to get out. Probably that’s why he tried to save this cassette as evidence earlier. And Futurio planned to infiltrate FC Borussia.

Maybe Julio had been blackmailed into turning on the coach. But probably that wasn't necessary at all. Toll had staged everything very cleverly. Through the video system in the security office, he had listened to the conversation in which Julio told Franke of his past. That was the opportunity for a sneaky trap. So it was really great to spray the cat on Julio's jersey and then hide the spray can in Franke's room. Kelly was somehow involved in this framing of Franke. Meanwhile, Strasser has spread some bad stories among the players. It had all worked out beautifully.

Suddenly Pete realized how long he had been in the security office. It was high time to disappear, because probably Toll would come back soon to check. Pete had to grab the video cassette and run.

"Let's see if the air is clear," he murmured and pressed a few buttons on the video system.

In the meantime a lot had happened in the hotel. In one of the corridors stood a guard who looked around searching. He reminded Pete of the men guarding the salvage yard.

Pete changed cameras. The receptionist also had company. Then a room became visible in which two old screen acquaintances were located—Mr Burt and Mr Toll. They were sitting at a meticulously tidy desk.

"These guys are getting on my nerves," Pete heard Mr Toll say. "I spoke to Oliver Crawford on the phone at the *Los Angeles Times*. They've just put him up at the Business Department. You know, one of his colleagues is the father of one of these guys. Andrews is his name." Burt nodded and kept listening. "Andrews is the father of that Bob, who appears here as a journalist. He's one of the boys, too. I haven't taken him seriously yet. But Andrews told Crawford that the boys were detectives and call themselves The Three Investigators—or something like that. They've already asked Andrews to enquire about Business World. But Crawford told him cleverly that there's nothing unusual."

Burt seemed nervous. "Bob Andrews, who are the others?"

"Pete Crenshaw, we know him as a goal scorer from the training game, and a certain Jupiter Jones, who wrote that lousy letter about our organization published in the *Los Angeles Times*. Crawford had informed us immediately."

So this Crawford had quickly put the guards on Jupiter's neck, Pete thought. A very enlightening conversation!

"But there's more—our new chambermaid Kelly is also part of the gang! I had it checked out," Toll continued.

"Damn it!" Burt slipped back and forth on his chair. "Just get them all out of my way," he whispered. "Now that we're ready, don't let anything jeopardize our efforts!"

"Unfortunately, we don't know where those detectives are," Toll said. "They've escape from our two overseers."

Pete grinned. So Jupiter and Bob really wiped them off. And if Toll had any idea where he, Pete, was at that moment, his sweat would surely break out.

Burt was not exactly happy with the information provided by his colleague. "Unbelievable! Call in some security guards right away. Tell them to check the area. These self-proclaimed detectives aren't supposed to screw everything up for us!"

"There are guards all over the hotel. Until the team leaves tomorrow morning, these kids won't be able to do anything."

"Kids? We'll show him!" Pete followed the conversation spellbound.

"And Alberto?" Burt asked.

"I'll leave him locked in the laundry room for now. I can drive him away later. I'm going to check the security office to see if Alberto's done anything there. By the way, to be on the

safe side, I posted one of our men outside the door.”

Pete flinched. Now it was his turn to sweat.

“Wait a minute,” he heard Burt say. “Cortes is coming to discuss the situation.”

Pete thought feverishly. He had to save the video cassette as evidence. And above all, he had to get out of here himself.

He had learned enough. But there was no way of escaping given the guard outside the door. He turned on the camera from the restaurant. There the players of FC Borussia sat together. A man had just got up and announced that he had to go to a briefing. That was probably Cortes.

Pete left the camera on and went to the sliding door. It was made of metal, completely smooth and without a handle. He looked at it closely. At the bottom, at a height of almost ten centimetres, an elongated metal bolt was inserted to prevent the door from sliding completely into the wall when it was opened.

That’s what Pete was looking for. He ran to the next shelf and returned with a whole arm full of video cassettes. Eagerly and as quietly as possible, he began to place them next to each other on the floor. Video to video, until the whole space between the metal bolt and the wall was densely filled. It wouldn’t be that easy to open the door now.

Pete ran to the control panel and studied it for a moment. Then he looked at the monitor. The situation in the restaurant had hardly changed. Cortes had left and the players sat around with their drinks and having a conversation. In the background of the dining room, Pete noticed a television screen that was also marked on the layout.

Pete switched again to Toll and Burt, to whom Cortes had joined in the meantime as expected. Pete heard how he reported that the waves in the team had not yet smoothed, and he will have to work on it. But as interesting as this conversation started, Pete didn’t have time to listen.

“Directed by Pete Crenshaw,” grinned the detective. “I’ll beat you with my own weapons.” He skilfully switched a few connections on the control panel and pressed a start button. Satisfied, he saw a picture appearing on the TV set in the dining room.

A few players already turned to the TV.

17. The Game is Over

Pete turned the volume up. If everything went well, the video recording would be clearly audible in the restaurant. On the screen Burt and Toll were now to be seen, how they whispered together. Alberto was about to enter the scene.

Pete hoped that in the next few minutes neither Cortes nor Toll or Burt would come into the dining room and that the video cassette would flicker undisturbed over the television. Fortunately, Mrs Sculley wasn't there either. Pete didn't really know how to judge her.

Doria was running around the room from time to time serving drinks. Now she also stopped and looked at the TV monitor. She turned briefly to the camera through which Pete observed the dining room. It seemed to Pete as if she was winking conspiratorially at him. He grinned. Everything was going like clockwork.

"Alberto, we're glad you came to help us at the Sports Division," Burt greeted Alberto on the video.

Pete noticed that Julio jumped up and went nearer to the TV. In a few moments, the players of FC Borussia would know everything that the club was the mouse in the trap that Futurio had so cleverly set up for it.

Pete checked the monitor in Toll's room. The three of them don't know anything yet. He hoped it stayed that way. Pete stared at the screen. Nervously, he grabbed his shoulder, which was still a little painful because of Alberto's kick... if only he'd known that they were on the same side.

In the restaurant, the players and their manager had gathered around the television like a bunch of grapes and followed the conversation spellbound. Only Strasser stood a little apart and looked around restlessly. Then he left the room unnoticed. Individual outraged cries of the players were to be heard.

In a moment, Pete's movie would show the final argument between Toll, Burt and Alberto. Then Strasser entered the restaurant with Mrs Sculley. Pete saw her stare for a moment, stunned, at the situation that was taking place in front of her. Then she seemed to understand. She turned around and ran out. Seconds later, she was standing in Toll's office. Pete had also switched over.

"Oh, Mr Toll, Mr Toll, I'm glad I found you so quickly!" she cried.

Toll jumped up. "But, Mrs Sculley, calm down and tell me what's wrong!"

"In the restaurant!" Mrs Sculley's excitement was such that she stuttered. "The restaurant! There's a recording on with a conversation with you and Mr Burt and someone whom I don't know. It's about the football club—that you want to take over. The players are all watching! Come quickly, Mr Toll!"

Toll and Burt looked at each other. Cortes had also got up. "Damn, there must be someone in the security office playing on the video system," Burt shouted. "Probably one of those stupid boys!"

"I'll get him," Toll shouted and looked into the camera.

"Just you wait, friend! If you see me through the camera, listen to me very carefully—I'll finish you off!" He disappeared from the picture. The others also quickly left the room.

Pete looked at the door secured by video cassettes. Now he was no longer so sure that his construction would last long. Hopefully Jupe and Bob would finally come!

Bob registered at the entrance security booth while Jupiter held the bicycles.

"Mr Klinger is expecting us," Bob said as discussed, "Jürgen Klinger, the player from Borussia."

The guard looked suspiciously at the bicycles. But then he nodded and let them pass.

"Well, that went pretty smoothly," Bob said as they cycled onto the hotel grounds.

"I don't know," Jupiter replied. "The man picked up the phone as soon as we got through. Besides, there's so many people here today."

Bob, too, let his eyes wander. "Look, there he is," he suddenly shouted and pointed to the hotel entrance. "Something must have happened."

The detectives saw some players of FC Borussia crowding out of the building. They seemed to be looking for someone.

Klinger saw the detectives and ran towards them. "Hi, Bob, you're not gonna believe what's going on! We've uncovered a conspiracy. Rather, it was probably your friend Pete," he said when he came to a stop. "And I suppose you're Jupiter? The other detective?"

Jupiter nodded. "Well, tell me about it, Mr Klinger," he said calmly.

Klinger reported the incident in abridged form. "Now we seek Burt, Toll and Cortes and confront them. But they have somehow disappeared," he concluded.

Jupiter patted Bob on the back. "So you were right about Toll. Now it's all clear. Also this attack on the trailer roof. Something about that has been bothering me the whole time. It was the position of the people to each other. Alberto at one end of the roof and the two guards at the other. They didn't threaten us, they threatened each other! We didn't matter at all to them. They wanted Alberto."

"But why did he come to us in the first place?" Bob asked.

"He probably followed us the night he tried to break into the hotel. And then, of course, he wanted to find out what role we were playing."

Bob nodded. "And now it's clear why he wanted to invade the hotel so mysteriously. Probably to warn his brother." Bob kept thinking. "Or else, he wanted to take this video cassette as evidence, because he planned to leave Futurio. Probably knew about the existence of the video."

"You're almost competing with me," Jupiter smiled. "That's exactly what I was thinking."

Klinger, who stood beside them the whole time, stepped restlessly from one foot to the other. Now he finally managed to interrupt the flow of thoughts between the two detectives.

"Haven't you forgotten something?" he asked.

"What is it?" said Jupiter and looked at Klinger in astonishment. "The case is now crystal clear."

"The case is, but what about Pete?"

"Pete!" Bob shouted. Three of them ran off. At the hotel entrance, they almost bumped into Doria, who was just around the corner, closely followed by an unknown man. But Bob immediately knew who it was. The resemblance could not be overlooked—it was Julio's brother, Alberto da Elba.

"The man from the video," Klinger stuttered.

"And our jaguar," Jupiter added. "Finally without painted canines. Doria unmasked you?"

Doria shook her head. "I only set him free. Toll had him locked in the laundry room. And when I saw the video earlier..."

Jupiter interrupted her. "How did you get Alberto out of there? Magic?"

"No, great detective," Doria said, pulling out a bunch of keys. "I'm a chambermaid. I have the keys." She grinned mischievously and strummed her keys in front of Jupiter's nose.

"And where's Pete?" Bob shouted in between. The little game between Jupiter and Doria didn't interest him much now.

"Pete?" Doria looked at him scared. "He must still be in the security office. Come, I will show you the way." She put the keys in her pocket and ran off. The others followed.

Bob and Doria were the first to run down the basement stairs. But when they arrived at the steel door, they retreated in shock. The door had been forced open. Under strong pressure it had flown out of its running track and was now leaning against the wall at an angle. Hesitantly, Bob and Doria entered the room. Video cassettes were scattered on the floor. A shelf had turned over.

"There must have been a fight here," Bob said to Juve, who had just arrived. "Looks like Toll overpowered Pete."

Alberto now also entered the room and purposefully went to the waste basket. "This is where I threw the cassette in when Toll surprised me. I wanted to take it with me as evidence. Your friend probably found it here and played it on the monitor in the restaurant." He looked around. "He's gone now anyway!"

"Alberto, how did you know the video was kept here?" asked Jupiter.

"All divisions of our organization have the same goals and the same ground rules. Regardless of whether I'm in the Business Division or here at Sports, we always keep the important material on the ongoing campaigns in the security office."

"Then you know the organization pretty well!"

"Sure, I've been around long enough."

Jupiter just smiled. "But where is Pete? It can't have been too long since Toll tracked Pete down here. But they didn't meet us either."

Doria agreed with him. "I don't think Toll and Pete could have walked out of the hotel unnoticed. It's like an anthill right now. The players are everywhere looking for Toll."

"Right!" Jupiter pinched his lower lip. "Alberto, you know your way around Futurio. Is there any other way?"

"Hmm... Yes! Every security office has a secret passage! But I'm afraid I don't know exactly where it is."

The group feverishly began the search. After just a few moments, Bob gave a shout. "Look!"

Jupiter jumped over. Bob pointed to a thin gap on the wall. Jupiter lay down on his stomach. Actually, a narrow gap indicated a door in the wall.

"The mechanism is probably in the Business World symbol," Alberto said. He pressed various combinations. Suddenly a whirring sound was heard in the wall. A slight jolt went through the door, but it didn't open.

"This thing's stuck," said Bob, who was scanning the wall.

"Oh, no," Doria shouted. "Who knows where Toll has dragged Pete to?"

"Probably to the Purity Centre," Alberto replied. "That is for the re-education of renegades. And once you're in there, you can't get out that fast."

"Don't panic, it won't take us any further," Jupiter said. "We'd better think again. What would be a sensible goal for this secret passage?" He looked at Bob. His eyes fell on Bob's hands.

Bob also looked down at his hands. He grinned.

"I know what you're thinking about, First Investigator. Let's go!"

"After us," Jupiter shouted and stormed out to the corridor.

Bob ran across the football field. Alberto and Klinger stayed next to him. Then Doria followed. Jupiter was panting after. Bob tore open the door of the changing room and ran directly into the locker room. Now it was clear to him how Toll could get unnoticed into the changing room during the football game to spray on Julio's jersey.

They came just in time. Toll was dragging Pete out of the secret passage, which—as Bob had already suspected—ended in one of the lockers. Pete's eyes and mouth were taped and his hands tied.

Jupiter was the last to arrive, but the first to speak.

"Toll, the game's over," he gasped. "Let go of Pete. It's no use anymore! Burt and Cortes have long fled."

He stared stunned, especially the presence of Alberto surprised him visibly.

This time, Alberto grinned. "Mr Toll, I'm so glad to see you again so soon. I'm particularly pleased with the circumstances."

He stepped forward one step. Then Toll turned around, jumped into the locker and locked the door from the inside.

While Jupiter and Alberto worked on the door furiously, Doria and Bob set out to free Pete.

"Poor Pete," Doria murmured as she pulled off the tapes to his mouth and eyes with a sensitive hand.

Pete stretched. "Thank you," he said and smiled. Then he looked around. "Nice to see you all. Toll was completely insane. I don't know what that madman would have done to me." Pete sat up. "But everything worked out with the video?"

"Yeah, great," Bob said. "Everybody knows. The plans of Futurio have failed. Congratulations!"

"It will be difficult to prosecute Toll," said Jupiter, who left the door. "The most obvious is the kidnapping of Pete."

"But now he's trapped," Doria said. "At least if the other door's still stuck!"

18. Go, Bob, Go!

Kühn let the ball bounce a few times and then kicked it back to Pete. “One more!” He stood between the posts of the goal post and waited for Pete’s shot. He ran and shot, but the ball clapped against the crossbar.

Julio and Alberto laughed. Bob thought it was wonderful to watch the two brothers. He could see that a long separation had found a happy ending.

“Why did you always wear the jaguar mask?” he asked Alberto.

“On the one hand, of course, so that Futurio could not recognize me so easily,” replied the Brazilian. “But more importantly, for me, it was some kind of sign.” Julio had joined in and listened. “A sign that I wanted to return to my past. I have given up all my personal possessions at Futurio. The mask was the only thing I kept all these years. It encouraged me.”

Alberto turned to his brother. “That’s why I put the mask in your room. I’m home. You got it.” Julio nodded.

“Well, luckily it’s all over now,” Bob said. “This afternoon my father is planning a longer interview with you for the *Los Angeles Times*, and I have already informed Krautbauer, the German journalist. The story in Germany will create such a bang that Futurio will be away from the scene for now.”

Alberto nodded. “I think so too. However, proving that the whole organization is behind it will not be so easy. Toll is at the police station, but he made the video cassette disappear somehow. Futurio has already announced that Burt and Toll have acted on their own. There will be endless legal disputes, and Futurio has very good lawyers. In addition, Futurio has many people in many high-up places. Your father now knows that with his new colleague Oliver Crawford.”

Bob nodded thoughtfully. “And you, Alberto? What are you going to do?”

“They will hunt me by all legal and illegal means. A defector knows too much. I’m gonna have to go underground for a while. But I think I can get through this.”

Franke joined in. He, too, was radiant since he had been reinstated as the coach.

“Practised enough?” he shouted and clapped his hands. “Let’s go to the penalty shoot out.”

It should be the highlight of the morning. The three detectives and their girlfriends had met Franke, Klinger, Julio and Alberto on the boys’ school sports grounds. Franke had brought Borussia’s goalkeeper with him to give the penalty training promised by Julio as a reward for solving the case.

Finally, Franke had come up with a surprise. “Penalty-kick duel—Detectives versus Borussia. The Detectives have, of course, home ground support,” he added with a look at Elizabeth, Lys and Kelly.

The detectives were thrilled and the girls joined in. “Sure, our girlfriends can play with us,” Bob said. “What’s the prize?”

Franke reached into his pocket. “I have five tickets to tonight’s big open-air rock concert.”

“And the rules of the game?” Jupiter asked Franke.

“Kühn will be the neutral goalkeeper. We will follow the usual penalty shoot-out rules in the large tournaments—Five against five, if there is a tie, it goes to sudden death.”

“But right now we’re six against four,” Jupiter said.

“Pete can join us,” Julio said. “He’s brave enough to have uncovered everything.”

Franke agreed.

Pete proudly switched over to Borussia—all professionals and him, that was clearly the winning team. Also Alberto had shot well during the training. The rock concert tickets were as good as safe there. In contrast to Juve, Bob and the girls, without him they are going to struggle big-time.

“Sorry for you,” grinned Pete.

“We’ll make it anyway,” Kelly shouted cheerfully.

“Get on with it!” Kühn was impatient. He also wanted to show what a good goalkeeper can do.

Julio was the first to set up the ball, started up, delayed briefly, let Kühn fly in the wrong direction as he sent the ball into the top right corner.

“I’ll never figure out your tricks,” Kühn shouted and kicked the ball back.

Now it was Jupiter’s turn for the Detectives. He stared into Kühn’s eyes to unsettle him, stepped back, took a long run and rammed the ball. Kühn got to it but the shot was too hard and the ball just slid in to level the score at 1-1.

“Whew!” Jupiter breathed deeply and the girls cheered.

“Great, First Investigator,” praised Bob. “That’s where you put your whole body weight on the shot!”

Franke grabbed the ball. With a short approach, he placed a softly-chipped ball up the middle of the goal, but Kühn just parried it away. “Not with me, coach,” he shouted. Franke turned away shaking his head. Julio told Pete that that shot was known as a Panenka penalty.

Then came the big chance for Lys to bring the Detectives into the lead. But the goalkeeper waited calmly and stopped her weak shot safely.

Jupiter comfortingly put Lys’s arm around his shoulder. “Everything’s still in there,” he said.

Klinger and Elizabeth both had the ball in the net to put the score at 2-2. Then Alberto scored to make it 3-2 for Borussia.

Kelly had to make up for that now, otherwise it would be all over for the Detectives. She ran up and fired sharply into the bottom right corner past the baffled Kühn. Cheering, she jumped into the air. “3-3!” Triumphant she looked over to Pete.

Now it was down to two kicks. It was Pete’s turn for Borussia and then Bob for the Detectives. If anyone missed now, it was the end—unless the other missed as well.

Pete grabbed the ball. This is it, he thought, Bob’s gonna screw it up. The fact that Kelly had scored so coolly annoyed him even more. Pete kicked, Kühn threw himself into the left corner and Pete watched in horror as the goalkeeper pushed the ball with the fingertips of his left hand, and let it slip past the outside of the post.

Pete went into the lawn in rage, with Kühn rubbing his hands.

“I knew you’d shoot to that corner. You already did that to me in the game,” he shouted. “So sorry!”

Pete went back with a grim face. Julio comforted him. “Can happen to the best player.”

“If Bob scores now, the embarrassment will be perfect,” Pete thought. “Bob, could you please blast the ball over the bar, else I’ll be listening to this story for the rest of my life.”

Bob took the ball and grinned. It wasn’t hard to guess what’s on Pete’s mind.

“Juve, pack the blankets for the music festival,” he shouted. “Too bad Pete won’t be there.”

“Well, that’s football!” Jupiter quoted one of Pete’s favourite sayings.

“Go, Bob, go!” The girls loudly cheered for their last penalty taker.

Pete watched nervously as Bob calmly put the ball on the spot, took a few steps backwards, paused for two seconds, ran forward and...

Bob scored!